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*Patrick Henry
and the Frigate's Keel*

Books by Howard Fast

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PATRICK HENRY AND THE FRIGATE'S KEEL

Edited by Howard Fast

THE SELECTED WORK OF TOM PAINE

HOWARD FAST

*Patrick Henry
and the Frigate's Keel*

AND OTHER STORIES OF A YOUNG NATION



DUELL, SLOAN AND PEARCE

NEW YORK

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For Rachel Ann Fast

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I

Patrick Henry and the Frigate's Keel





PATRICK HENRY AND THE FRIGATE'S KEEL

THIS spirit of liberty must have wandered in Europe for a good many years before it came to America, but it came to America a long time ago, so long ago that my grandmother couldn't say who brought it here originally. And my grandmother had this story from someone else's grandmother, and she from another, and none of them could remember who brought the spirit of liberty to America.

But they all knew about Sam Adams and Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, and each of them when he had the spirit of liberty did great things. So Sam Adams started a fuss, and Benjamin Franklin nursed it, and George Washington got to be called the father of our country, all because at one time or another they had the spirit of liberty within them. As my grandmother said, without the spirit of liberty they might have been just like you and me; but my grandmother couldn't say exactly what the spirit of liberty was, although she told me a lot about it.

Well, it seems that George Washington met Patrick Henry the day before Henry was to make a speech, and they

shook hands and had a few words together, although Washington didn't think too much of him at the time—Patrick Henry being just a young upstart who was trying to be an orator. But the next day Patrick Henry rose and made a great speech, which ended, “—give me liberty or give me death.” As my grandmother said, you could see right there that the spirit of liberty went into him and he was destined to do great things.

Well, after that, on and off, there were doings in America that made the world sit up and take notice. Of course, they didn't know about the spirit of liberty getting in and out of so many people in the thirteen colonies; they thought it was just a kind of disease broken out, and they rooted for England to win, but England didn't have a chance against the spirit of liberty. Patrick Henry got about the country, talking and shaking hands with a great many people, and he spread the spirit of liberty pretty thoroughly. But Patrick Henry had something about him that made the spirit of liberty come back to him again and again. That was all well and good while he was alive, because he got around. You might say that there never was a time before or since when the spirit of liberty was spread so thoroughly. It did things, and all of a sudden there was a new nation with a lot of strange ideas about men being free.

Well, time passed; the Revolution was over and the new nation sort of settled down. And Patrick Henry began to get worried. By this time, he knew that the spirit of liberty was in him, and he began to think seriously about passing it on to somebody else. He began to think that soon he might die, and the spirit of liberty might die with him. It was enough to bring a man down with worry.

He could see that the spirit of liberty had been with him

too long. Things weren't getting better; they were getting worse. The thirteen colonies were biting and snarling at each other like cats and dogs, and they were like to split apart and go up like dust. He got to traveling desperately up and down the land, but it didn't do any good.

He became old before his time with the great burden he had carried, which no longer did him any good and couldn't do anyone else much good. Then he decided to make a trip to Boston, which had always been a rare, fine place for someone to take up the spirit of liberty. He got to Boston, but Boston had changed. Patriots no longer walked about with fire shooting out from under their brows. There was no longer talk of righting wrong and freeing men from the bonds of slavery. It was enough to make a man who loved liberty hang his head with shame, and it drove Patrick Henry to despair.

The good Boston men talked of ships and commerce and profits, and the price of cotton in the South and the price of corn in the North, and tariffs and trade restrictions—such talk until Patrick's head buzzed. And wherever he went in the fair town of Boston, in coffee house or tavern, it was the same. And it was no use for him to shake hands with men, because the spirit of liberty stayed with him. He got to see that there was really no one left in Boston who was interested in the spirit of liberty. It hardly seemed possible.

He looked up Paul Revere, and Paul Revere talked eagerly of new methods of smelting copper. Sam Adams was away being governor. John Hancock was dead, and Patrick Henry wished that he too had not lived to see such a thing as this.

All the length and breadth of Boston it was just as though the Revolution had never been fought.

Well, a tired and saddened old man, Patrick Henry walked

down to the waterfront where the shipyards were. There, all was activity; men spoke of brigs and barques and far Cathay, but never a word about liberty.

He wanted to rest. He came to a place where they were building a ship; only the keel had been laid, great timbers of teak, soaked with pitch, rich with a warm smell that did the old man's heart good. He sighed and sat down on the keel. Some of the ship workers glanced at him, but they didn't ask him to go, he was such a fine-looking old gentleman.

Now while he was sitting there, it happened to him. A great and heavy load was lifted from his heart, and he didn't have to think twice to know what had happened to him. The spirit of liberty had gone out of him. The great burden was gone. He could have laughed aloud for joy, and he glanced about eagerly to see who had become the proud owner of the heritage. Then his heart sank. There was no one near him. The ship workers had gone on working, just as if nothing had happened.

For a moment, all hope disappeared. He decided that the spirit of liberty had left him and dissipated itself. It was gone for good.

That for a moment, and then he heard the sound. At first, he couldn't tell where the sound came from, and then he realized that it was in the wooden timbers of the keel he sat on. It was the sound of many things: it was the sound of wind strumming the ropes of a ship; it was the sound of men shouting triumphantly; it was the sound of guns roaring; it was the sound of the storm driving everything before it; and through it all, thin and clear, there was the voice of liberty.

He stood up, and he went to one of the shipyard carpen-

ters. "What ship will that be?" he asked the carpenter, and he pointed to the keel.

"Ain't no ship," the carpenter snorted, with contempt at a landsman's ignorance. "They reckon her to be a frigate. They reckon to build a frigate for a navy and stand up to England, but I call it a waste of taxpayers' money. One vessel ain't a navy and one vessel ain't goin' to stand up to England. Why don't they leave England alone and mind their own business? Times is good now and business booming."

Patrick Henry smiled curiously, went back to the keel, and listened. But there was no sound now; night began to fall, and the bare timbers seemed to mock at what he had heard before, if indeed he had heard it.

As my grandmother said, he didn't know, and he died without knowing whether the spirit of liberty had left him and gone into the timbers of a frigate. He left Boston, and it was two years later that he died.

As my grandmother said, it seemed that the spirit of liberty was just about gone for good.

You can well imagine that things in the country went from bad to worse. Those who had known and been possessed by the spirit of liberty at one time became old and died. While they lived, they sighed and tried to make their peace with conditions. But it was hard. A new generation of smart alecks had grown up; they talked about the Revolution as a lot of nonsense that shouldn't have happened; they spoke of the old men as old fogies who couldn't keep up with the times. They made a mess of things all around.

Time passed, and the nations of the world, who at first had had a lot of respect for the young republic, sat back and

laughed. They could see where we were just a flash in the pan, and they waited for England to take back what she had lost.

Maybe England sensed that the spirit of liberty was just about gone and forgotten, because she didn't waste any time. She realized that here was her chance to wipe out all this nonsense of America, and in order to do that, she needed a war. America wasn't anxious for war, but England began to prod her, and she kept on prodding her. Perhaps if things had been as they were in the old days, America would have bluffed back and settled it all without war.

Anyway, war came. As my grandmother said, people never realized that the spirit of liberty was gone until the war started. Then they woke up and looked around for the spirit of liberty. They ran to Paul Revere's shop, but it was closed down, with a "For Rent" sign out. They looked up the Liberty Boys and found that the society had been dissolved. They tried Independence Hall in Philadelphia and found it wasn't any better than a museum.

That was the way things stood, and England didn't waste any time. She had decided on a naval war of hard, smashing blows, and she had the largest, most powerful navy in the world to back up her demands. For years, she had been lord-ing it over the seas with that navy, impressing American seamen to work her ships, doing just about as she pleased. Now she struck, and the first thing Americans knew, their capital city was taken and in flames. Well, after that, most people considered that it was all over, and those who had any hope asked feebly why there was no navy, and whether one couldn't be built. A few persons kept looking around for the spirit of liberty.

Now all this time, the spirit of liberty had not been in

the country at all. Instead, it had been locked up in the timbers of a little frigate that was just about all the navy the United States had. She wasn't anything unusual, this frigate, just a vessel of fifteen hundred tons, and built much the same as most frigates in the French and British navies. She carried fifty-two guns and sailed nicely. Her name was *Constitution*.

Up to this time, she had been mostly away from America, sailing here and there, and stirring up a nest of trouble wherever she went. As my grandmother said, this was because of the spirit of liberty, which had been in America so long that European people had kind of forgotten what it was like. But now, wherever the *Constitution* touched, she left some of that spirit, until all Europe was buzzing like a hornet's nest. Of course, they didn't know what was doing it; they didn't know about Patrick Henry sitting down to rest in the Boston shipyard. They took all this as a natural thing and thought it was their own cleverness that made them whisper around that men should be free.

Now the captain of the *Constitution* was a man by the name of Isaac Hull. He was nobody's fool, and he couldn't help seeing all the trouble the *Constitution* caused. At first, he wasn't quite sure of things; but once when he was down in the hold inspecting the keel timbers, he heard a sound like the noise of men singing. It came from the keel, and when he put his ear close to the wood, he heard the song of liberty. He was a hard-headed Yankee, but he had lived through the old times, and when he was a boy he had seen the tongues of flame leap from patriots' eyes. So notwithstanding that he was a hard-headed Yankee, he listened and while he listened he found things out. He listened until he

had the whole story, right from the time Patrick Henry had seated himself to rest. Isaac bent over and laid his hands on the wood, and he kept them there until he found himself throbbing with the spirit of liberty. Then he went up on deck and cried out to the helmsman, "Steer for the port of Boston!"

Then he stood by the prow, and the vessel turned like a thing alive and bounded for Boston town.

Well, you never heard a town mutter and nag the way Boston town did when the *Constitution* sailed into port. You would never have thought that this was the place where they had manufactured great things, like the American Revolution. They sat in the coffee houses and complained, "He should have known better than to run the blockade . . . Now he's in, he'll never get out . . . Old Isaac's a thickhead, no mistake . . . He ruined the little navy we have . . . They're like to keep him bottled up here the rest of the war . . ."

Old Isaac smiled and nodded, and invited a few of the leading men in town to come aboard his vessel. He led them down into the hold and told them to listen. They listened, and memories of the old days returned. They heard the singing of an old tune called "Yankee Doodle." They heard the soft voices of men sitting through the winter at Valley Forge. Some of them remembered. Then they heard the song of a chase, telling them how on the way to Boston, the *Constitution* had scampered away from an entire English squadron, as if there were no wind except for her own sails.

Among these leading men of Boston, there was one old man whose name was Paul Revere, a keen Yankee businessman with a nose for new industries, like smelting copper. Well, he listened with scornful eyes, the way a hard-headed

Yankee's eyes should be, and he heard a sound different from the other sounds; it was like the drumming of a horse's hoofs, the cry of the horse's rider shouting, "Awake! Awake! The British are coming!"

Well, those leading men went back to Boston, and with them they took a breath of the spirit of liberty, and you never saw anything like the change that came over the Boston townsmen. They toasted Isaac left and right, and they toasted the *Constitution*, and they flocked on board, and then they flocked back to town laughing at the British navy.

As my grandmother said, Isaac saw that he had spent enough time setting Boston town back on its feet, and that it was time for him to go out and lick the British navy good and proper. So he set his sails and rode out of Boston harbor with his glass at his eye.

Now meantime, the British were having a good laugh at the American navy. They pointed out that the *Constitution* was hardly more than a bundle of pine boards with some striped bunting over it, and hardly worth engaging with anything more than a catboat. They were in a rare mood for humor.

So was old Isaac, for that matter, and he kept his glass glued to his eye until he sighted the *Guerrière*, an English frigate of some thirty-eight guns. He invited her to battle, and she swung to meet him. Isaac waited until the two vessels were within pistol shot of each other, and then he opened with all guns. Fifteen minutes later, the *Guerrière* was foundering. Her mizzen-mast was shot away, her hull was splintered and her rigging was torn to pieces. Now the *Constitution* fouled her, plucked off her bowsprit and shot away her mainmast.

She surrendered, and, looking at his own ship, which was

hardly damaged, Isaac muttered something about its being a beginning. The *Guerrière* was too damaged to save.

Isaac sailed to New York, then, for he thought that there was a place where the breath of the spirit of liberty was sore needed. There, until Isaac anchored his vessel, it was the same as it had been in Boston, muttering and grumbling and no faith in anything. But when Isaac had been there a day or two, what with men of the city coming on and off the frigate, the tune was changed.

After that, Isaac sailed back to Boston, but the news of his victory had preceded him. They gave him a banquet and they toasted him, and none was better in the toasting than Paul Revere himself.

Well, the way my grandmother tells it, Isaac could see that the spirit of liberty was coming back into the land, and since he had already got enough to last him, it was time another stepped onto the poop deck of the *Constitution*. So he gallantly surrendered command of her to Captain William Bainbridge.

By now, there was no lack of patriots, because the spirit of liberty was being spread up and down the land. Right off, you could see the change, the way people pricked up with hope. However, certain men knew the story of Patrick Henry sitting down to rest, and these men were worried that perhaps the *Constitution* might sink one of these days and take the spirit of liberty along with it.

They went to Bainbridge and they warned him solemnly, and then they went below with him, into the hold of the *Constitution*, where he laid both his hands on the wood of the keel. Then he knew things that he hadn't known before.

It may be that my grandmother was wrong about the

Java; but she said that this English frigate was the finest vessel England had ever launched upon the seas. All of shining steel were her cannon, laid over with gold to show England's majesty and pride; all of rich mahogany was her woodwork, and her stern was inlaid with gold and ivory. They built boats differently in those days, and you can see where such a vessel would sneer at the *Constitution*, which was only pine boards and some teak.

When Bainbridge came in sight of the *Java*, the proud English officers aboard her laughed and wondered whether it paid to struggle with such a poor enemy. But Bainbridge bore down on them, and soon not even laughter could be heard above the thunder of guns. And at first things didn't go too well with us, for the steering gear of the *Constitution* was shot away.

Then the spirit of liberty came out of the keel and filled the sails, and the *Constitution* rode without a rudder, pouring her shot into the *Java*.

That battle lasted a long time. With the defeat of the *Guerrière*, England had only been humbled on the seas, but the loss of this second frigate would be a fearful blow. As my grandmother says, the English sailors felt the spirit of liberty and lost heart. The battle lasted about two and a half hours, and when it was over, the *Java* hauled down her colors.

Well, Bainbridge returned to Boston, and there wasn't enough that they could do for him. The country had shaken off its despair, and almost every person you met had some small part of the spirit of liberty that old Isaac Hull had loosed from the *Constitution*. You wouldn't believe that a thing could be spread so thoroughly and so quickly. In the taverns, in the coffee houses, everywhere, they spoke of nothing else. As for the *Constitution*—well, people went

around saying that we didn't need a navy so long as we had the *Constitution*.

You may be sure the British didn't take all this too well. Here, for hundreds of years they had been talking about the staunch wooden walls of England; here, for longer than any man could remember they had been sole masters of the seas, and here they were no longer masters of the seas, but made to look very foolish by a single crew of Yankees. It wasn't as if a navy had defeated them, because you couldn't rightly call the *Constitution*, just one frigate, a navy. The English looked around and said to themselves, "Time to do something, else we'll be the laughingstock of the whole world. These Yankees are such confounded upstarts that first they take a country away from us, and now they're running our navy off the seas with a bundle of pine boards." That was just about what they said to themselves, and they were pretty hot.

As my grandmother says, they began to look around and see just what was what. They sent their men into America, and told them to find out just how the *Constitution* was built, and also to find out about this Yankee stubbornness that made them up and lick a person who had them down. They sent them mostly to Boston, not only because the *Constitution* was anchored there, but because in those times everyone knew that Boston was a prime place for manufacturing gunpowder, revolutions, uprisings and minor struggles for the rights of man. Well, the Englishmen came to Boston, snooped around, spoke to one person and another, visited places like Paul Revere's shop, Breed's Hill, where the Battle of Bunker Hill had been fought, and the old belfry tower. But with all their visiting, they couldn't find

out anything except that the *Constitution* was built mostly of pine.

Now the Englishman is kind of stubborn himself, and a lot of people say that's where the Yankee stubbornness came from originally and that once a good many Yankees were English—although my grandmother doesn't think so. Anyway, these Englishmen kept on until they got to visit the *Constitution*, and by passing themselves off as Virginia men, they got down into the hold where they heard the voice of the spirit of liberty. Some say that listening to this voice, they remembered a man whose name was Wat Tyler, and something else called the Magna Carta. That may be so.

When these Englishmen came back to England, King George called them up and said, "Now, what is it those Yankees have that makes them so confounded annoying?"

"Why, Mr. King," they answered, "it seems that down in the hold of that frigate they call the *Constitution*, they have the spirit of liberty."

"What spirit of liberty?" King George wanted to know, thinking that most of this was stuff and nonsense.

"Why, the same spirit of liberty we had at one time, Mr. King, only it seems kind of used to America and talking up their ways."

Well, the king hemmed and hawed and finally dismissed them, and maybe he had them punished a bit for taking in so much Yankee nonsense. Only, as my grandmother says, he got to thinking afterward that perhaps there was something to their talk. He didn't want the spirit of liberty back, but he thought it would be a good thing if it were put away at the bottom of the ocean where it couldn't raise any rumpus. So he let it be known around, here and there, that it

would be a good thing if the *Constitution* were destroyed.

When the good people of Boston town heard that, they laughed, and all up and down America there was more of the same kind of laughter. By this time, they were so filled with the spirit of liberty that they just didn't have any doubts. They knew that England was merely talking big, and they knew that all the English navy couldn't chase the *Constitution* from the seas. It got to be that you would bump into a patriot in America every few steps you took, and they were the real old-fashioned kind of patriots, with fire flashing from their eyes; and if you sat down in any coffee house, offhand, you could sit all night and listen to talk about the rights of man. Things were picking up.

Now the people of Boston got ready to send the *Constitution* off again, and this time it was under the command of Captain Charles Stewart. You might think that Will Bainbridge and old Isaac would have been unwilling to give up command of the ship that way, but in those old days men were different. The spirit of liberty got into them, and they thought more about their country and freedom than they did about themselves. So Will and Isaac, who had had enough of the spirit of liberty, were glad to let Charley Stewart take his turn at it.

Well, the sails filled, and the *Constitution* scudded away with the ropes singing "Yankee Doodle." People said that the *Constitution* raced over the waves like a bird, and at the prow, scanning the horizon for a British vessel, was Charley Stewart.

You may be sure that it wasn't too many days before a British boat was captured. And then another. And then she sailed back to Boston harbor, the British glad enough to be rid of her. My grandmother says that old King George be-

came so nervous that all you had to do was to mention the *Constitution* and he turned white as a ghost. It even got to a point where a good many Americans began to feel sorry for the British, the way their whole proud navy was being run off the seas by just one old pine-board frigate.

Well, it went on that way, with the *Constitution* capturing boat after boat until the war was over. The British sort of curled up and granted that it wasn't any use fighting with stubborn, senseless Yankees. They made their peace with us, and the *Constitution* sailed into Boston harbor, and the people cheered their heads off at her. They cheered for a long time, and then they got some rope and tied the frigate up to a dock.

As my grandmother says, people have a way of forgetting. You wouldn't believe how quickly they forgot about the spirit of liberty and about Patrick Henry sitting down to rest on the keel timbers of the *Constitution*. Instead, they were picking apart Patrick Henry's speeches, to show you that he didn't really mean what he said.

Time passed, and things weren't so bad as long as some of the spirit of liberty remained in some of the people. These people kept things going. But about that time, the country began to spread, and it was a wonder to see the way people flocked west and kept flocking west. Folks got spread out, and along with that the spirit of liberty became thinner and thinner.

And then, just the way it had been before—different parts of the country began scrapping like cats and dogs. It was enough to make a body sick, the way folks forgot the things they had fought for a long time back. And the *Constitution* didn't get about to keep spreading the spirit of liberty; it

just stayed tied up to a dock in Boston, gathering green weeds and barnacles all over its bottom.

Finally, it came to a pass where just about nobody had any of the spirit of liberty left in him. Things had gone from bad to worse, and the government at Washington said to itself, "Here's an old frigate called the *Constitution* rotting away in Boston Harbor, with us paying out money for a man to watch it. It's a nuisance and an eyesore and it gets in the way of things. Why don't we break it up and sell it for old fire wood?"

You can see what a pass things had come to when they decided to go ahead and get rid of the *Constitution*. Instead of the people standing up and raising their voices against it, they just nodded their heads and agreed that it was an economical thing to do.

And it might have been done, except for the poet. This poet was a very wise man, and he had heard about the spirit of liberty, and he set out to find it. Of course, he didn't know about the *Constitution*, because folks forgot that the spirit of liberty had ever resided in that old, rotten hulk, but he did know that at one time the spirit of liberty had blown like a fresh wind through the land, and that now it was gone. He made up his mind that if he found the spirit of liberty he would put it into a song, and that the song would be on everyone's lips.

He set off to search for it, and he had a mighty hard time. He went around asking folks if they had heard about the spirit of liberty, and people looked at him as if he was crazy. They explained to him very carefully that a man had enough to do making a living and putting away a little for the future without bothering about the spirit of liberty. Those were good Yankee qualities, they explained to him. When he

insisted that the spirit of liberty was a Yankee quality too, they turned around and stared and said they were a lot too busy to bother with the likes of him.

Well, he became so downright discouraged that he decided to give it all up. He turned around to go home, and when he got home, he read in the papers how they were going to break up the *Constitution* and sell her for old wood because no one cared for her any more.

He said to himself, "I reckon I'll see the old boat before she goes down. Like enough, there soon won't be anything of the old times left." And with that he took himself off right away to Boston Harbor.

Now when he came to the *Constitution*, even the watchman had gone. The government figured there was no use keeping a watchman on a lot of old pine boards that were soon to be sold for fire wood. The poet came on deck and stood there, and from somewhere he heard a sound that was like the voices of men singing. He followed the sound—into the dark hold, right down to the keel. He stood there, bending his head to listen, and when he had listened a while, he knew more than he had known before.

He heard a song, and when he left the *Constitution*, his head was full of that song. He wrote it down, and it began this way, "Ay, tear her tattered ensign down—" He sent that song to a newspaper, and the newspaper published it, and everyone who read it breathed in the spirit of liberty, which the poet had put into a song.

Before you knew it, there was an army of folks up and down the land telling the government that they wouldn't stand to have the old frigate broken up for firewood. And after the government people had breathed in some of the spirit of liberty, they were glad to leave the old vessel alone.

So there she stands to this day—same pine boards, same keel timbers, same old canvas. And all day long, people go in and out of her, and when they come away, they take some of the glowing, living spirit of liberty with them.

2

Rachel

☆ ☆



RACHEL

PA SAT on a stump with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, for the Lord only knows how long. Just like that, without moving and without eating. I cooked a piece of meat for dinner and offered him some, but he shook his head, and when I cooked a piece of meat for supper, he did the same. He just wouldn't eat and wouldn't move and wouldn't talk. So I went to sleep, and when I got up in the morning he was still sitting there.

I said, "Pa, how long you going to carry on this way?"

Then he looked over to the edge of his cleared land where there was some fresh dirt and a cross, and then he looked at me as if he had seen me for the first time in maybe six months.

I told him, "Pa, it's two days since Ma died, and you ain't moved from that stump. Sure, you'll starve to death."

Then he grinned a little and got down off the stump.

"Get out the skillet, Dave," he said. "We'll fry up some smoky."

So we sat inside the cabin with the pan of smoky between

us, eating and looking at each other. I could see that Pa wanted to talk to me, but figured I was too young to be talked to. Instead, he smoked his pipe after he had finished eating. Then he got down Ma's old Bible, opened it, and set himself for writing with a piece of charcoal stick.

On the front inside cover of the Bible, which was the only book we had in the house, there were a lot of dates and places and names. Pa held the book a long way off, squinting at the writing. He was all right when it came to slow reading of block print, but not so good with writing.

"Births and deaths," he said slowly. "Back East, when kin passes, all the kinfolk gather for funeral doings. You wouldn't know, Davey, but it makes the heart easy. Here—well, here there ain't nothing but this Bible."

"It's a mighty pretty good book," I said.

"Sure it is, Davey, sure. But it ain't like kinfolk. A man can't rightly live and be human without kinfolk. How old are you, Davey?"

I figured awhile and then said, "Ten years, two months and maybe a for'night."

Pa figured and summed on his hands. "You were born third day of March, 1778, Davey. So this is the seventeenth day of May, 1788."

I nodded.

Pa fiddled for a while with the charcoal stick, then gave it to me. "You write it in, careful like, Davey."

I wrote out, "Susan Harvey died on the fifteen day of May, year of our Lord, 1788, of fever."

"Age twenty-nine," Pa said, his voice kind of hoarse. When I put that in, Pa read what I had written. "Put in Northwest Territory, Davey." Then he closed the Bible and put it back on its shelf.

He went outside, and I was afraid that maybe he had gone back to sitting on the stump with his face in his hands. But when I came out, he was harnessing the horse for plowing.

It was a week later when Pa made up his mind to go into the stockade. The stockade was called Murry's Fort, and it was the nearest place where there were folks and a store to buy and sell. It was thirty miles odd if you used the ford, and nearer forty if you took the ferry, and it was a mighty big place, with eighty-seven people living inside the walls and in the neighborhood. Mostly, I was shy of so many folks, but it was a wonder to see what they had to sell in that store.

Pa said that morning, "Dave, a boy like you can't run wild like a critter."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Well, it ain't right. We ain't woodsy folk; we're proper farmers, and a man goes bad if he can't have bread with his meals and a stitched garment for his back. Your Ma had reading and writing, and I got a little, and it ain't proper you should go wild."

"I'm going to be a hunter," I said. "Just as soon as I can tote a rifle, I'm going off to hunt and trade with the Indians."

With that, Pa fetched me a smack across the head, the first since Ma had died.

"Davey, don't say that again," he whispered.

"Why?"

"You'll learn why. Maybe out here's the deep wilderness where you forget the word of God, but I ain't forgot. Men-folk in our family and in your ma's were farmers and smiths and maybe a doctor or a law man. But not no-account." And with that he went to saddling up the horse.

"We're going in to the stockade," he said.

"Why?"

"To get me a wife and you a ma."

"I won't have no other ma!" I yelled. "I'll be damned if I will!"

"Dave," he said quietly, "you put on your shoes and shut your mouth. You swear again and I'll tan your hide right off you. See if I don't."

I could tell that something came over Pa. He didn't seem easy, all the way in to the stockade. He kept muttering to himself, and he rode stiff in his black Sunday britches. We rode together, me behind him and holding onto his waist, and he held his gun away from his white Sunday shirt, so that he shouldn't dirty it.

The stockade sits across the river on a little hill; if you use the ford in dry season, the water runs under the horse's belly. The stockade isn't much for looks or size, and most folks live outside.

Pa and me, we forded the river with the low evening sun at our backs, with the water running like fat oil. We came up on out and Pa switched north, and for a moment I was glad, thinking maybe he had changed his mind. But he stopped in front of Parson Jackson's house, dismounted and lifted me down. The parson came around the house from the back, where he had been washing his face and hands in a bucket of water. The parson's wife poked her head out of the door, and the parson's four kids held back and stared at our horse. The parson's kids were townfolks, not woodsy but soft and small, and I didn't pay much attention to them.

"Good evening, Brother Harvey," the parson said. . . .

"Evening, David. . . . It's a long time since you came in out of the woods."

"A long time," Pa agreed. "A man gets wanting for the sight of folks."

"Sometimes when preaching, Brother Harvey, I feel that my flock is scattered beyond call. With you out in the deep woods, with the Grants forty mile down the river, with the Sutters north in the wilderness—well, a man's voice carries just so far."

"I know," Pa said.

"And Mrs. Harvey?"

Then I began to whimper; what with riding the great distance to the stockade, with this and that, I had almost forgotten. I had hoped that Pa would forget too.

"Stop that, Davey," Pa said. Then he told the parson what had happened.

The parson's wife came out to listen and click with her tongue. The parson folded his hands and looked grave and sympathetic.

"And that's how it was," Pa said.

"The will of the Lord," the parson nodded.

"First I thought I would go crazy," Pa said. "Couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't think. Wanted to take my gun and go off into the deep woods. A man in the deep woods goes like an animal, and it's easy forgetting. Then I told myself, 'You got to raise up the boy, like she wanted. Raise him up proper, with Bible reading and writing.' But a man can't be alone with thirty acres cleared, a hundred more to clear, crops going in and meat to be hunted, and expect to raise a boy proper."

"What you need is a wife," Mrs. Jackson said.

"Ah," the parson nodded.

"I been fighting it," Pa said.

The parson nodded and looked thoughtful. The parson's wife looked even more thoughtful.

I said, "Damn it, no! We can get along, Pa and me!"

"Shut up, Dave!" Pa snapped.

So I went off toward the river, crying awhile in the grass with my face in my hands and hating Pa. Then I felt better and went back. They were in the house now, drinking tea; it wasn't much better than our house, just one room, with a loft for the kids, squared logs and paper in the windows.

Pa was saying, "I don't know. It ain't fitting a man with thirty acres clear should marry a bondwoman."

"'Tain't what's fitting but what's practical," Mrs. Jackson said.

"Unless you wait for new womenfolk from back East," the parson said. "And there might be none coming this year."

"Or wait for Millie Flann to grow up," Mrs. Jackson nodded. "Fifteen's a mite too young to take on a widower's responsibilities."

"But a bondwoman—"

"Put pride behind thee, Brother Harvey. It ain't for love you're wedding, but to have a woman on the farm."

"True," Pa agreed.

"You got the twenty dollars to buy out her year's service?"

Pa went through his pocket, sorting out money. In his wallet, he had an English pound and six old shillings. His other pockets gave out silver dollars and old notes. I never knew Pa was that wealthy. He and the parson counted it over three times.

"Nineteen dollars, sixpence," the parson said finally. "A

dollar's for the ceremony and sixpence for the church leaves eighteen. You ain't got other money, Brother Harvey?"

"None outside my britches," Pa replied.

The parson rose and put on his coat. He gathered the money into his pocket and said, "I'll go to Brother Green and make the bargain."

"The two dollars?"

"I'll make the bargain, brother. Come along."

I went, too; nobody told me not to—in fact, I think Pa was kind of glad to have me along with him.

Pa kept glancing at the bondwoman while the parson argued the price of her indenture with Mr. Green. Folks said there weren't so many bond persons around as before the war, and other folks said that back East laws were being passed to keep persons from being bound into service. Being bound was the same as being a slave; a father could sell his daughter for ten years' service, and people in debt could be bound in by their creditor. Or if a man died in debt, his children could be bound into service by his creditors.

As near as I could make out, that was the case with this bondwoman. Back East, her folks had died, and she had been bound in for the debt. Mr. Green had got her from some river traders for a thousand pounds of parched corn, and I didn't think much of the bargain. But there wasn't but one woman in the house then, and Mrs. Green needed a hand to help with the cooking and the baking and the washing and the putting by. Since then, Mr. Green's son had married, and that's why Parson Jackson considered that maybe he could pick up this bondwoman for Pa at a bargain price.

The bondwoman sat in a corner, on a stool by the hearth,

while Pa and the parson and Mr. Green argued about the price. The bondwoman wasn't much to look at; just a little thing with a white face and dark hair. She watched them, and sometimes she glanced at me.

"I ought to be making a profit, not selling at a loss," Mr. Green said. He was a down-East Yankee, and I could see that neither Pa nor the parson thought a lot of him.

"When there ain't none to buy, the seller can't be choosy," the parson said.

"There's one to buy, all right."

"She's a bondwoman, and Brother Harvey here, he's buying her out of bondage. It's a Christian thing to do."

"I paid out in good corn for her."

Pa sighed and said, "Look a here. Suppose I pay that two dollars out this fall."

"Won't be no profit," Mr. Green protested.

The bondwoman looked down; then she put her face in her hands.

"I'll make it three dollars," Pa said.

"My wife stitched her three calico dresses."

"It ain't like she's a good woman," Pa said. "I'm taking her to wife because a man can't keep a place out in the forest alone without he goes woodsy or mad entire. I got thirty acres clear and a hundred more to take the wood off. The boy needs a rod taken to him, and mine ain't the hand can do it."

"Damn it, I don't!" I yelled.

Pa fetched me one and said, "Four dollars."

The bondwoman looked up and murmured, "Please—"

Mr. Green glanced at her, then said, "I'll take it."

"Done," the parson said.

"How old is she?" Pa wanted to know.

"Four and twenty, and good health."

I ran outside; I heard Pa calling for me, but I didn't come back. I wondered how he could forget so soon, after all the years with my mother.

It took us two full days to get back to our cabin from the stockade. That was because the horse couldn't carry all three of us; so Pa and I rode and the bondwoman walked behind. Her name was Rachel.

Pa insisted on having the marriage ceremony performed that night. He said that the stock wanted feeding; anyway, he had spent all his money and might as well get back as soon as he could. I was brokenhearted about the money; I thought maybe he would buy me some sugar hards at the store.

So I stood there and saw him married to the bondwoman. I suppose, if she wanted to, she could have protested that being a bondwoman didn't mean she had to marry her new owner, but the parson had spoken to her about bettering her place in life, I guess. She didn't have a lot of spirit; she just stood there with her head down and became a wedded woman.

And the next morning, Pa woke me before sunrise. The horse was saddled up, and the bondwoman was there, looking pale and tired, her two calico dresses in a bundle under her arm. The bondwoman came toward me, as if to say something, but I shied away; I didn't want any truck with her.

I said, "Pa, let's be getting back." And Pa nodded and climbed onto his horse. He reached down an arm and swung me up behind him.

"Come along," he told the bondwoman.

I was glad it was that way; it made me see that she was still a bondwoman, and that Pa hadn't married her out of wanting someone to take Ma's place, but because he needed a woman to work out at the cabin.

At the river, Pa set me down on the other side and then went back for the bondwoman; and I could understand that, him not wanting her to spoil her dress when she had only three calicoes. We didn't go very fast, because the bondwoman had to rest every now and then.

We had smoky for noontime meal, and Pa let the bondwoman cook it. Pa and I ate first, but he didn't stint on how much smoky she ate; Pa wasn't the kind to stint on food. But a few slices were enough to satisfy her. While Pa was smoking his pipe, I took a good look at her, for the first time, really. She wasn't bad looking; not comely and big and strong, but white-faced, though not so bad looking. I saw that her eyes were blue and light; something I hadn't noticed before, since most of the time she kept her eyes cast down.

After Pa had smoked a while and figured it was time to start again, he rubbed his mustache and cleared his throat.

"Rachel," he said, "my boy here, Davey, he's ten years old and growing like ragweed. I guess you'll cotton to him." Then he knocked out his pipe and said, "You ain't much of a walker?"

"No," Rachel answered.

"Don't talk much either."

"No." She never looked at him.

"Well, I'd just as soon let you ride, only it ain't fitting a bondwoman should ride and her master walks, even if she is wedded wife to him. Also, it ain't fitting a woman in calico should ride astraddle."

"I think I understand," she whispered.

Pa nodded and rose; he mounted his horse, and Rachel picked up her bundle and followed him.

That night, Rachel made her bed aside from us. Pa looked at her strangely and then said, "You'll be cold, away off from the fire."

"I'll be all right," she said.

"Good and tired, I reckon," Pa remarked.

"No, I'm not tired," she answered slowly. "A bondwoman can't know how it is to be tired."

Pa shot a deer on the way home; he told Rachel she could start it salting and smoking the next day. The first thing he did when we reached the clearing was to point out Ma's grave.

"A good woman," he told Rachel.

"Not like you," I muttered.

It was fine, clear weather, the end of that May and into June. Pa said that if things held out that way, settlers would be flocking in thicker than bees. Pa cleared two more acres.

Rachel kept the house; one thing about her I couldn't deny, she kept things neat and spick-and-span. She made bread every other day, and she cooked growing things, like parsnip and redtop. And I'd see her washing out one of her calico dresses each day; evenings, she'd sit with her needle and mend.

But it wasn't enough for Pa, and I made sure it wasn't enough for me either. Pa was always finding fault with one thing and another; the meat wasn't smoked right or the cow wasn't milked right; the food wasn't cooked right. Not like Ma had done it; he kept reminding her about that, day after day, week after week. He wouldn't let her forget

her place as a bondwoman. But that was before the hunter came.

Rachel was supposed to school me for an hour each morning. Even if she was a bondwoman, she had plenty of schooling, reading and writing and sums and subtraction, and history and even geography. That was another thing I held against her; Lord, I hated that schooling.

Well, one morning I heard her calling me. I came slow and easy, for all her calling, "Davey, Davey, where are you?"

"What is it, Rachel?" I asked her.

"Learning, Davey."

"Well, damn it, why don't you leave me alone?"

"Please don't swear, Davey," she said.

I said, "Rachel, I'll swear like I want to."

She stared at me with those wide blue eyes of hers, and then she said, "Why do you call me that, Davey?"

"What?"

"Rachel."

"That's your name, ain't it?" I demanded.

"Yes, but I'm your mother."

"You're a bondwoman," I said. "I seen my Pa pay out your price—eighteen dollars cash and four dollars owing."

She reached out a hand as if to find something, but found nothing and stood there with that arm outstretched, trembling. I was frightened, thinking that she would fall, but then she seemed to get hold of herself, moved over to a bench and sat down. All that time her eyes never left my face.

"How about the schooling?" I asked her.

She said, very slowly, "You can go out today, Davey—without schooling, please."

I didn't wait to hear any more; I ran outside, whooping and yelling.

But that night Pa put it to her. I was up in the loft, supposed to be sleeping, but through the open hatch I could see Pa sitting at the table with his pipe in his hand.

"Rachel," he said.

I could hardly make out her voice. "What is it?"

"Davey tells me you didn't give him his schooling today."

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

There was a long silence then, and finally Rachel said, "He called me a bondwoman."

"And was the hurt of that so that you couldn't school him?"

"There was no hurt," Rachel said; "only shame."

"How?"

"You wouldn't know!" she cried. "You wouldn't know!"

Well, it was fine weather all along, and Pa turned the black earth like it was cheese and rooted out stumps and put in his crops. The hunting was good, too, and as much work as he did, Rachel matched him. He never let up on her for work, making sure, I guess, that she would pay out the eighteen dollars and the four owing. She salted meat and smoked meat, mended britches and sewed shirts, and did the cooking and the putting by. Her skin turned brown, and her eyes seemed to be lighter and lighter blue. She wore her hair in two long braids down her back.

And then the hunter came.

Out in the deep woods, paying a call wasn't a measure of distance. Hunters came by and paid their respects after they walked a thousand miles down from Canada country,

and then, maybe, a walking man would range down to Kentuck or off to French Orleans. Packmen, mostly Scotch and Jewish, would come by with their two mules loaded up with trade trinkets. "Hello," they'd say, and then be off for the land of the Ojibway; and then pay their respects five months later back to New York and Boston to sell their furs.

The hunter's name was Jim Fairway, and he was a walker, all right, a woodsy man who never had homespun on his back, nothing but buckskin and fancy Indian beadwork. A thousand miles was grass under his feet. A big man with long yellow hair.

He came into the clearing one day, walking soft and easy, and twirling his long rifle over his head. "Hullo, there!" he yelled. "Hullo, there, you Sam Harvey! . . . Hullo, there, Davey!" He seemed sure glad to have listening folk to hear the sound of his voice.

I came running, and Pa laid down his work to grin at Jim. He liked Jim, even if Jim was no-account and woodsy.

"Where you from, Jim?" Pa called.

"Canady."

"Walk it?" Pa asked.

"You don't sight no horse," Jim grinned, swinging me up to his shoulder. I sure liked Jim.

"Well, set and rest," Pa said. "Set and rest."

"Pleased to."

"Seen Injun sign?" Pa asked.

"Some."

We were all walking toward the cabin now. Pa said, "This is been a mighty fine year, without no trouble."

"You get trouble when you don't the least expect it,"

Jim said, and Pa crossed his fingers. I knocked wood on the stock of Jim's rifle.

"Where's Susan?" Jim asked.

Pa sobered and pointed to the grave. "Two months now," he said.

Jim shook his head and squeezed my arm. We walked on a while, and then Jim said, "Must be mighty lonely out in the deep woods with no womenfolk."

"Well, it is and it ain't."

"Can't raise a boy proper without womenfolk," Jim said.

"No."

"Can't a man live without them either, less'n he goes wild or woodsy," Jim said. "This time I figure to get me a wife and a piece of land to plow and break wood out of."

"Why, that's fine," Pa said.

We were at the cabin now. Jim put me down and laid his rifle against the wall. Pa led the way inside; Jim came in last.

"Well, it's mighty nice feeling, inside of four walls," Jim remarked.

"Set yourself," Pa nodded, pointing to the table. "Fried pone and smoky ought to—" But Pa didn't finish what he was saying; he saw that Jim wasn't listening to him at all but staring at Rachel. She stood by the hearth, her face flushed and bright from the heat of the fire.

"Who's that?" Jim asked softly.

"That?"

"Her name's Rachel," I said.

"Rachel," Jim nodded.

Pa said hurriedly, "She's a bondwoman I bought from Matt Green. Had to have a woman round the place."

"Sure."

"Can't raise a boy—"

"Sure," Jim said. "She a serving girl?"

"No."

Jim never took his eyes from her face. "Kinfolk?" Jim asked.

"No."

"Just a bondwoman?"

Pa stuttered, "Sure, Jim, bondwoman or no, Christian folk can't live together, man and woman, without taking in marriage."

Jim smiled. "How y'do, Mrs. Harvey," he said.

Rachel said, "It's the first time a—man called me that."

I could see that Pa was worried about something; I could see it by the way he growled at me and by the way he set to working twice as hard as any man should work. It got worse and worse, until a week had gone by and Jim was still staying on.

Rachel had changed in that week. She seemed to get taller and straighter and prettier, and she laughed a lot. She never used to laugh before Jim came.

She fussed with things, too, setting fresh flowers around the house, and sometimes wearing a flower in her hair. Once Pa came in all hot and sweating with his work and saw Rachel standing in front of the cabin with a red flower in her hair.

"You look mighty pretty, Rachel," Pa said curiously, looking at her the way he'd look at a stranger.

"Thank you, Mr. Harvey," she said.

But Jim had more time for Rachel than Pa did, and it seemed to me that Pa was purposely staying away from

the cabin more than he had to. Jim was always there, except when he went out to hunt; and Jim was a mighty fine and easy hunter, bringing in so much meat that Pa couldn't rightly complain about him staying on. When Jim wasn't hunting, he was hanging around the cabin, talking with Rachel and admiring her cooking and telling her his adventures way out in the deep woods. Even when Rachel gave me schooling, Jim hung around, explaining that he was sure in need of a little schooling.

Well, one day Pa came into the cabin when Jim and I were there by ourselves, Rachel having gone down to the spring for water.

It was a hot day, and after Pa had hemmed and hawed about not having cold water to douse his head with, he said to Jim, "This is a mighty nice long visit you paid us."

"Sure is," Jim nodded.

"Mighty long for a walking man with a itch to his heels," Pa said.

"Oh, I got rid a' that itch," Jim grinned.

"Never knew a walking man who could stop walking and root in one place."

"Some can," Jim said.

Pa scratched his head. "Yup," he admitted, "I remember you saying how you were prepared to settle down. Well, Jim, wives don't grow on trees. You got to get out and go a hunting."

"Don't reckon I got to do much hunting," Jim said.

"How's that?"

Jim turned and nodded to where Rachel was coming up the hill with the buckets of fresh, cold spring water.

"There's Rachel."

"Rachel?" Pa said.

"She's a mighty fine, fair woman," Jim drawled.

"How?" Pa said.

"Well, you bought her out for eighteen dollars cash and four owing. I got silver money in my pockets, and I'm prepared to pay you out thirty dollars cash."

"Hell," Pa grinned, "you're joking."

"I ain't."

Pa said, softlike, "She's my wife, Jim."

"Is she? You don't treat her like men treat a wife; you treat her like a bondwoman."

Still softly, Pa said, "Better be walking, Jim. I been ten years in the deep woods and I got thirty-five acres clear, but I ain't yet ordered folk off my place."

"You ain't ordering me," Jim said. "Leastways, not without Rachel. I offered to buy you out, fair and—"

I never saw Pa's face like that before. He muttered something under his breath, and then he let go at Jim like a wildcat springing. Jim was taller than Pa, but Pa was broad and hard.

Jim went down with Pa on top of him, and then they raised dust like two panthers, hitting and gouging and swearing.

I whooped it for Pa, but they were tangling so hard I couldn't rightly tell which was which. And inside of a minute from the time Pa had jumped Jim, Rachel was there, dragging them apart.

"Stop it, stop it!" she cried.

Somehow, with all their tangling, they heard her. She pulled them apart and to their feet, almost by main strength. Pa and Jim were both bruised and bleeding, their faces splotched and their clothes torn. Rachel stood between them, glaring first at one and then at the other.

"Men!" she said. "Oh, you fools!"

Pa and Jim Fairway just stood there, staring down at the ground.

"Making out a fine picture for Davey," Rachel said. "Two grown men fighting like a couple of wild Indians. Why?"

Pa kept his eyes on the ground; so did Jim. Rachel turned to me and demanded, "Why were they fighting, Davey?"

"You shut, Davey," Pa said.

"You speak up, Davey," Rachel said, her voice very cold and even. The way she said it and the way she looked at me, I couldn't help telling her.

"Jim wanted to buy you with eight dollars' profit for Pa, and Pa told him to go to—"

"You shut, Davey!" Pa roared.

"He'll speak," Rachel said, her voice trembling a little. "He'll speak all he wants to. And so will I."

I never saw her like that before, her eyes blazing, her whole body tight with anger.

"Maybe that's best," Jim said. "Tell him you're going along with me, Rachel."

"Going with you!" Rachel cried scornfully. "So you can buy me and sell me, just as you please! So you could have a wife and a slave at the same time, just as he had!"

"Now, Rachel—" Pa said.

"You shut!" Rachel snapped, and Pa kind of folded back and stared at the ground again.

"I'll tell you where I'm going," Rachel said. "I'm going back to the stockade. And if you think the work I've done here for you and for Davey and for that lazy, no-account hunter isn't worth eighteen dollars cash and four owing, you can warrant me with Judge Lang when he makes cir-

cuit. Only I wouldn't, if I were you. He's like to put the whole lot of you in jail."

Rachel came out of the cabin with her two calicoes under her arm and a bag of smoky and bread. Without a glance at Pa or Jim, she strode off down the hill in the direction of the stockade. Pa and Jim watched her go into the woods.

Jim scratched his head.

Pa said, "Well, I'll be damned."

Jim said, "Lazy, no-account hunter."

Pa said, "Feels kind of strange with Rachel gone off."

I felt that way too. For all that I had plagued Rachel, I felt that everything was kind of empty and to no purpose with her gone off.

Pa went out to the fields and came back, leading the horse. Then he went into the house and got his gun and pouch and horn.

He mounted and said, "Come on up, Davey."

"Where you going?" Jim demanded.

"After her."

"Can't see that you can do much without waiting for the circuit court and putting a warrant to her," Jim said. "Unless you lay hands on her."

"Never laid hands on a woman in my life," Pa growled.

Jim shrugged.

Pa said, "I ain't bringing her back. If a woman's ungrateful enough to turn on a man who's bought out her indenture and married her legal, then I don't want her."

"You don't?"

"Nope. Only I wouldn't let no woman walk in the dark woods without menfolk to see that harm didn't fall."

"That's so," Jim admitted.

"She might get lost."

"I guess I'll come along," Jim said.

Pa growled and spurred the horse, but when I looked back, I saw that Jim was running after us.

We rode hard for about three or four minutes, until we were well into the forest, and then Pa pulled up the horse and said, "Get down, Davey."

"Why?"

"I told you to get down."

We walked on, leading the horse, and in about ten minutes more, we saw Rachel in the woods ahead of us. Pa quickened his pace, so that I almost had to run to keep up with him. When we got to Rachel, she was standing still and facing us.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Nothing; nothing, Rachel. Only I reckoned you might as leave ride, it's that long a distance to the stockade."

"I walked it once before," Rachel said.

"Here's the horse," Pa muttered.

"Then ride him back and leave me alone." And she turned and walked on.

Pa tagged after her. "I can't leave you walking alone in the deep woods," he said.

Then Jim caught up with us, toting his long rifle and panting from his run. Rachel turned and faced them, her head caught in a long ray of sunlight, her eyes blazing.

"Leave me alone!" she cried.

But Pa and Jim kept following her, Pa leading the horse.

That night there wasn't enough that Pa and Jim could do for Rachel. They made a big, roaring fire for her, but Rachel would have none of it and built her own fire about

ten yards away. She set the smoky to cooking and the bread to warming. Pa and Jim had come away too quickly to think of bringing food, and they just sat in front of their fire, wrinkling their noses and sniffing the smoky.

When the smoky was done, Rachel said, "Davey, would you like something to eat?"

"I ain't very hungry," I muttered.

"Just a little?" she said.

That smoky smelled terribly good. Pa and Jim were just staring into their fire as if nothing else interested them. So I went over to Rachel's fire.

I ate smoky and hot bread until I felt good and warm and comfortable. "Thankee," I told Rachel.

"That's all right, Davey."

I felt mean and small, thinking of the way I had acted toward Rachel. She put her arm around me, and soon I fell asleep.

When I woke up in the morning, Rachel was still sleeping, but Pa and Jim were sitting in front of the dead embers of their fire, just as they were the night before.

I called, "Pa, ain't you slept at all?"

He shushed me, pointing to Rachel. She woke up, stretching and yawning, smiled at me, and then let the smile go as she saw Jim and Pa. She cut cold smoky and bread for our breakfast.

"I guess they're mighty hungry," I said.

"I guess they are."

We set off again, only this time I walked along with Rachel. She was so nice to me, I couldn't lift up and light back to Pa. Jim and Pa followed along with the horse, about ten yards behind us.

Once, Rachel said, "Your ma must have been nice, Davey."

"She was—but so are you."

"I reckon you favor her," Rachel said; "not your Pa."

Noontime, we finished the smoky and bread. Jim and Pa built a fire again, but I helped Rachel make her own. They must have been awful hungry, because all morning they walked with their guns ready, like men hunting; only never a sign of a creature crossed our path, and I guess neither would go off to hunt and leave the other alone.

Noontime, Jim did say, "My, that smoky smells awful fine."

But Pa never said a word.

It was some hours after noon, when we were walking along and getting near to the stockade, that I heard a turkey gobbler calling behind us.

"That's a turkey gobbler," I told Rachel. "It would make mighty nice eating if Jim or Pa would go off and hunt it."

"I don't think they will," Rachel said.

The gobbler called again, and I looked back to see what Jim and Pa would do. For some reason, they had stopped and were facing the other direction.

Suddenly, Pa threw up his rifle and fired. There was a long scream, not the scream a gobbler makes.

Rachel put her arm around me.

Pa and Jim ran toward us, and without saying a word, Pa lifted Rachel and swung her onto the horse.

"Shawnees," Jim said.

Pa threw me onto the horse. "Tell them at the stockade!" he cried, and slapped the horse across the rump. The old horse clattered through the woods, and when I glanced

back, Pa and Jim were crouched down behind a fallen tree.

I guess we had gone a few hundred yards or so when Rachel seemed to come out of her trance. She pulled the horse up sharp and slipped down from it.

"Davey," she whispered, "can you find the stockade?"

"Sure."

"Then go there and bring them. Davey, I have to go back—I have to." And she began to run toward where Pa and Jim were.

Well, it wasn't much to ride the five or six miles to the stockade and come back with Parson Jackson, Matt Green, Lem Thurley and four or five others.

Lem said he didn't believe the Shawnee story because there hadn't been Shawnees within a hundred miles for God knows how long. Sure enough, we weren't more than three quarters way back when we met Jim Fairway, walking along with his long rifle over his shoulder and whistling like there wasn't a Shawnee in the country.

"Hey, you, Jim Fairway!" Lem Thurley yelled.

Jim grinned and waved, and we rode up to him.

"How about the Shawnees?" Parson Jackson said.

"Lord, I feel free," Jim said. "I'm a walking man and a hunting man. I got an itch to my heels and a load in my gun, and I ain't touched food in two days."

"How about the Shawnees?"

"They was two, and they're dead," Jim told us.

"Well, that's that," Lem Thurley said. "I might 'a' known."

"I guess I'll go along back to Pa," I said. I felt petered out.

Matt Green said, "Hold on. How about the four dollars your pappy owes me?"

Jim grinned and fetched silver from his pockets. "I'm paying," he said. "I'm sure happy to. I got silver money to spend." And he paid Matt Green out the four dollars.

They went back, Jim with them, and I rode on. I got to the fallen log, and there were Pa and Rachel, just sitting and looking at each other. When Rachel saw me, she jumped up with a little cry of relief.

I slid off the horse and began to whimper.

Pa said, "Davey, stop that bawling!"

"Let him if he wants to," Rachel said.

I looked at Pa, and he said, "Davey, do like your ma says."

The Pirate and the General





THE PIRATE AND THE GENERAL

WHEN you come down to it, we Americans had only one pirate, and yet he was enough, all that a pirate should be, and so peculiarly American that they say, down on the Delta, even today: "You understand, the good Jean, he is not criminal, but gambler, as you might say. He is always making deals. Like a faro gentleman." And then they will tell you, word for word, explicitly, just what happened on that September 3, in 1814, on the lush green Louisiana coast.

They will tell you how His Majesty's brig *Sophie* stood into the island and flew a yellow signal from the masthead. Also how the *Sophie* was painted, again explicitly, black and red, white bands on the black masts, and one white stripe around her; you see, they remember those details so well down there, in spite of the fact that the rest of us have forgotten.

The sound of the *Sophie's* signal gun was like a clap of thunder, and the pink flamingoes darted up out of the marsh. A line of red-coated marines formed at attention

upon the deck, the bo'sun's pipes twittered brightly, and a gig was lowered. Into the gig stepped two British officers in their beautiful full-dress uniform. A sight to see! They made for the shore, in the direction of a little brick fort that showed among the liveoaks, and out from the shore came a boat to meet them. Four men at the oars of this sleek boat from the shore, and perched in the bow, Dominique You.

A man, that Dominique! The boats came together, and he spat into the water. Held together with hooks, the boats rocked and swayed, and one of the officers, Captain Lockyer, demanded:

"You are Jean Laffite?"

A moment's hesitation, for the question was addressed in English, a tongue Dominique did not care for, although he spoke it well enough. Then he spat in the ocean again and answered, "No."

"And where is he?"

Dominique shrugged. As a matter of fact, as any old hand on the Delta will tell you, Jean was with a woman. Come heaven, hell or the mid-year flood, you could depend on it, Jean would be with a woman. Tick them off, if you want to, Lizette, Claire, Lucille, Marchette, Marguerite, Josephine, Louise—you could go on, believe me.

The other officer, Captain McWilliams of the Royal Marines, said, "I don't like the looks of this."

Dominique shrugged.

"Deal with pirates—"

"He don't like to be called a pirate," Dominique said.

"Will he see us?"

"Maybe," Dominique said.

So the boats went in to shore, to the beach in front of the fort, a beach lined with a motley crew of brigands. Bare-

footed, rings in their ears, red handkerchiefs on their heads, yellow sashes, pantaloons. The two officers came ashore, uneasily; they stood there waiting, and presently, down from the fort, came Jean Laffite.

At that time, Laffite was thirty-four years old, good looking, tall and sunburned, brown hair and brown eyes and a comfortable smile. If you had asked him, he would have told you he was in business, more successful than some, less so than others.

His business interests were many: there was, of course, first and foremost, that name with an ugly sound—piracy; he waylaid ships up and down the Caribbean and through the Gulf, English ships for the most part, some Spanish ships too. This practice he tended to legalize with the explanation that America and England were at war, and that Spain was a nominal ally of England. Some said that the only reason he didn't waylay American ships was that the British blockade kept them in port, but there are always rumors about certain men.

To house the steady stream of goods Laffite's employees brought in, warehouses were needed, and since the pirates could consume only a tiny fraction of the goods, Jean Laffite was projected into the business of buying and selling. Since New Orleans was at best a limited market, soon Laffite's flat-boats began to ply the Mississippi, and presently his laces, wines and satins appeared in the New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Charleston shops. On the side, having what amounted to a Yankee instinct for enterprise, Laffite had gone into the iron grillwork business and had also opened a school for fencing. Being one of a family of five brothers, Jean had involved his relatives in his growing enterprises:

Marc was a New Orleans lawyer; Pierre checked the corsairs as they came and went.

Politics, they will explain to you down on the Delta, were not so different then from today, and it was no wonder that Jean became a power in New Orleans. He made deals . . . What else could you do with him; an army could not have penetrated the swamps below New Orleans and dug him out.

He nodded at the two British officers, annoyed that they had come at just this moment, anticipating what they would say to him, trying to prod at the things which drove him, and finding difficulty in putting these vague impulses into understandable terms of dollars and cents.

As the fishermen on the Delta remember, "He was a thief, this Laffite," still the lilting French accent in their voice. "What else you call him, but dirty thief, same as Governor Claiborne in Orleans call him, same as President in Washington call him, dirty thief? Ah-yah! What make a thief, what make honest man?"

The English officers, after shaking hands with Laffite, the thief, were asked in to dinner. And at dinner, they came directly to the point.

"America," they said, "is done, finished, a transition, something that never really mattered. You understand?"

Dominique You, also at the dinner, using the same phrase they use today, *Ab-yah!*, smiled a little and nodded. "Finished, ah-yah." He was a neat, precise little man who had once been a captain of artillery in Napoleon's army; he looked like a dressmaker or perfume salesman until you saw his eyes.

Jean Laffite said nothing.

In summing up, the visiting officer repeated things that everyone knew. In the course of a two-years' war, America had known nothing but defeat. Her armies ran away. The residence of her President had been burned down to the ground; her shipping was driven from the seas. Her commerce was ruined. Not even a faint straw of hope.

Dominique You munched chicken; Jean Laffite's brown eyes were completely noncommittal. The British officer showed that he was informed on more than general affairs, for he pointed out that even while he spoke, Jean Laffite's brother, Pierre, was in jail, put there and held there by Governor Claiborne of Louisiana.

"That is so," Laffite agreed.

"And the governor," Captain Lockyer went on, "being given a choice of enemies, ourselves or you, prefers you. He knows that we intend to attack New Orleans—"

Dominique You's eyebrows went up.

"And he prefers to attack you."

"I know that too," Jean Laffite nodded. "But how do you find out about such matters?"

"We have our sources."

"And we have our traitors," Laffite shrugged. "Each traitor has a price, no? What is your offer?"

"A thousand pounds?"

"The governor," Laffite said, "he put five hundred dollar on my head. So I put thirty thousand dollar on his."

"A captain's rating?"

"I'm more like a general right now," Laffite grinned.

"A pardon for yourself and all your men."

Dominique You slapped his knee and bubbled with laugh-

ter. While the two officers looked at him, Laffite explained:

"Suppose we go into circuit court, they sentence us to hang—how much water will your pardon hold? You get me a pardon from Washington, hey?"

"We burned Washington," the captain mumbled.

"What else, then?"

The captain of the brig *Sophie* and the captain of Royal Colonial Marines looked at each other; then they nodded and played their trump card—or, at least, so the people of the Delta swear, history having apparently overlooked this somewhat minor detail on a broad canvas. Captain Lockyer leaned forward and whispered to Jean Laffite, yet not so softly but that Dominique You heard it:

"Governor of Louisiana—"

"Ah-yah!" Dominique cried, slapping his knee, and Jean Laffite told him angrily:

"Damn you, shut up!"

Then there was silence, quite a period of it; for as they point out, those who remember the tale, there is much you can offer a pirate and a thief, legality, money, honor, even a colored ribbon or two to pin on his breast, and all that is nothing but colored icing on the cake compared to the things men dream of. And what do men dream of but power, and what sort of power may compare to governorship of a province so large that no man really knew where it began and where it ended?

That is the story they tell down there, word for word, explicitly, concerning the events of September 3, 1814, in the lair of the pirate, Jean Laffite. They will add to it other details, for instance, how Laffite wrestled with himself, with the glorious, juicy plum, how a girl, trying to persuade him, brought ghosts out of their graves, Benedict Arnold, Simon

Girty, Wilkinson, Burr, Rogers, even a certain member of the exalted Adams clan, to prove that neither class nor family is exempt from the nice lure of betrayal.

Now Dominique You wondered, "But are we Americans? We are French, but in Paris they would jail us. In New Orleans they would jail us, in Washington, too, they jail us. With some people you can make a deal, but go try and make a deal with the crazy Yankees."

"Maybe with freedom you don't make deals," Laffite said quietly.

"Freedom! Go get your brother from jail first."

And two hours later, they were still at no decision. And two days later, still at none. They will tell you, down there, and make you understand, how not only the fate of Louisiana, but the whole unfolding fate of America, rested upon the decision of this pirate; and we will get to that part of it ourselves later. But they point out:

"This Laffite, he is dirty thief, no? So how you figure it? Maybe he love country, no? Sure as hell, he don't love Washington!" You have to agree with that.

The British officers left with the promise that in two weeks the pirate chief would make his decision. In two weeks he made it, and he sent a letter off, not to the commander of His Majesty's brig *Sophie*, but to Governor Claiborne at New Orleans. And here is the letter, word for word:

"MonSieur:

"I address Myself to you with confidence for an object on which can depend the Safety of the State. I offer to return to this State many Citizens Who perhaps have lost to your eyes that sacred title. I offer Their Efforts for the Defense of the country. This point of Louisiana that I occupy is of Great Importance in the present Situation. I offer

Myself to defend it. I am The Lost Sheep who desires to Return to the Flock.

"In case, Monsieur le Gouverneur, that your Reply should Not be favorable to my ardent wishes I declare to you that I leave immediately so Not to be held to have Co-operated with an invasion. This can not Fail to take place, and puts me entirely at the Judgement of my conscience.

"I have the Honor to be, Monsieur le Gouverneur,
"Laffite."

If we are to make a case of honor among thieves, we might as well go back, for the sake of our story, and investigate certain dishonor among so-called reputable men.

You must remember, that was a bad time; and bad times then were a good deal worse than bad times today. The country had been driven into a war it did not want and for which it was ill-prepared. The regular armies had been smashed, partly by the enemy, partly through the machinations of a group of traitors who had their headquarters at Hartford, Connecticut, and who had not only sold their honor for power, but were ready to sell their country, too. Defeat in war, partition of the nation, loss of independence and freedom, all that was acceptable to them if only it would destroy democracy and put them into the seat of power.

But they are not our story; they failed, as other groups of their nature failed, before and since then. Our story concerns a pirate and a general. The pirate we have met; the general's name was Jackson, and he came from Tennessee, which has raised up a good many sound men in the course of years.

When everything was lost and the traitors would have

withdrawn all armies from the field and made peace, Jackson recruited his own army. He raised it from Kentucky and Tennessee men, men who knew a horse and a rifle when they saw one and were also not ignorant of a thing called freedom. Properly, they were not a regular army, not even what they called, in those days, the militia, but a people's army of armed citizens. The enemy was to call them "dirty-shirts" for the long, gray homespun hunting frocks they wore instead of uniforms. They were intent upon the preservation of the union because it involved so deeply their own preservation; let the union be dismembered, and they would be a fringe of homeless nobodies on a lost frontier.

There were between two and three thousand of them, and they marched south with Andrew Jackson to lead them. They picked up some regular troops on the way, and they drove the Seminole Indians back into the swamps. They taught Spain a lesson in Florida, and then they marched west to where Wellington's veterans were preparing to land at New Orleans and deal a death blow to the Union.

When Governor Claiborne of New Orleans received Jean Laffite's letter, he was inclined to act upon it. It contained the first definite and precise information concerning the British attack on New Orleans, and it offered, in defense of the city, a group of tried if undisciplined fighting men. But when he read it to his council, they pointed out to him that since such a degree of honor was obviously impossible in a pirate, therefore it was a forgery.

So he sent it on to General Jackson, who was approaching New Orleans with his army of frontiersmen. Then he sent what troops he had to destroy the pirate's stronghold at Barataria.

Jean Laffite had his sources of information too, and when he heard of the governor's decision, he sent for Dominique You.

"By God," he told Dominique, "it is hard like the devil to be an honest man."

"And what for?" Dominique demanded. "Let them send their soldier down here. We smash them—pouf!"

"We don't smash them."

"I think you crazy, so help me God. You don't want to be governor of Louisiana?"

And everyone agrees that Laffite's answer, then and afterward, was, "What kind of damn fool land make me a governor? You want to live there?"

"Sure."

Laffite said, "You're just a fool, Dominique. How much it cost for a deal to get Pierre out of jail?"

"Maybe five thousand dollar," Dominique said hopelessly.

"Go get him out."

And that was that, and when Governor Claiborne's little army showed up, the pirates were gone, cleared out completely; his victorious return to New Orleans was marred only by the fact that Pierre Laffite had disappeared from the city jail.

So much for the record, but when you try to get at the root of what motivated that strangest of all pirates, Jean Laffite, even the people of the Delta can't help you. They will remember knowingly that Governor Claiborne recovered from the hideout of Baratavia over half a million dollars' worth of loot that Laffite's corsairs had garnered from the shipping of many lands and which he had not found time to remove. But why Laffite avoided and fled

from a miserable little force he could have ripped to pieces—that they can't say.

The next episode in the strange tale of Laffite concerns a woman, perhaps the same one he had had with him at the hideout when the British officers visited him—although that is hard to say, such a throng of women come in and out of his life. And an emerald necklace, too, as if this story of a pirate were an invented romance, instead of the gospel truth, word for word, detail for detail, as anyone on the Delta will tell you, if you only take the trouble to ask.

It seems that in his hasty departure from Barataria, Jean had time to take only a few choice items, one of them a necklace of emeralds; and a week later he slipped into New Orleans with a dual purpose in mind, to see his lawyer, Edward Livingston, a friend of Jackson and former mayor of New York City, and to give the necklace to a certain lady. Much legend attaches itself to this necklace, and it has been said that to obtain it Jean and Pierre fought a great battle against a Spanish frigate, sinking it finally; but there is no proof for or against that. Anyway, one night, close to midnight, Jean turned up in the lady's bedroom, the necklace dangling enticingly from one lace-covered hand.

She was a practical lady. "Is it true," she asked the pirate, "that Claiborne took a million dollars' worth of loot out of Barataria?"

"Unless prices go up—no. Maybe half of that," Jean smiled.

"And you are angry?"

"I am always angry when I lose so much money," Laffite nodded, and he put the necklace on her. But a little while

after, he took it off her, and along with it her long yellow hair; for in a burst of sympathy, she showed him a package of treasonable correspondence she had been conducting with the enemy.

Perhaps there is nothing new about the French custom of so treating a collaborationist female. But her father had influence with the governor, and it was published around that clipping her hair was Laffite's vilest crime. However, that is hardly true.

Afterwards, Laffite told Dominique You, "Love of God, there is no one faithful."

"No one."

"No one without a price for treason."

"No one but maybe that damn Yankee General Jackson."

"I don't like Yankees—"

The Yankee General Jackson, sick with fever, suffering from ulcers and dysentery, lay in bed and cursed the citizens of New Orleans. He had good reason to swear. Having made his way to New Orleans with his army of three thousand backwoodsmen, having opposed, in doing so, much of the vacillating and frightened Washington government, he discovered that the city was ready as a ripe fruit to fall.

Somewhere to the south of the city was a powerful British army. From one direction or another, the army would make its way north to New Orleans, and it was very necessary that the enemy should be stopped short of the city. But when it came to a knowledge of the wild, swampy land at the Mississippi's mouth, Jackson met up with a blank wall.

Not only did no two maps agree, but no two citizens of New Orleans agreed on the number or direction of the twisting waterways that led to the gulf.

Jackson called in his friend, Livingston, and pleaded with him that he had to know. He said, they say, "There is someone, Edward, there must be someone who is sane in this damned comic-opera city!"

"Undoubtedly—"

"Someone who knows the swamp."

"I know someone who knows the swamp," Livingston said. "His name is Laffite."

A stream of ripe language put an end to that. "I'll hang him to the highest oak in the city," Jackson said.

Livingston subsequently repeated that to Laffite, word for word, and Laffite's only comment was, "What does the general want done?"

"The waterways blocked."

"They will be blocked," Laffite said.

And so they were. Dominique You led a hundred of Laffite's men up to Jackson's headquarters, where they volunteered for service in the swamp. Did they know the swamp? They said, yes, they had some little knowledge of the swamp. Of course, every Creole present recognized them for what they were, but if the Americans were so stupid, that was the Americans' affair. The pirates blocked the swamp. The pirates volunteered for service in the few small gunboats Jackson had. And a week later, Jackson issued a handbill for the arrest of Jean and Pierre Laffite.

Of course, every Creole in New Orleans knew Jean Laffite, and of course no one claimed the reward money that Jackson offered, any more than they had claimed the reward

money Governor Claiborne had offered. By this time, the little French town which had so recently come under the jurisdiction of the United States was boiling. Five hundred red-sashed, cutlassed Baratarians owed allegiance to Jean Laffite, and everyone knew they fought like devils, and here was the Yankee madman, Jackson, posting handbills for their arrest instead of making a deal with them.

Well, Jackson had his conception of law and order, as was only fitting in a man who later became President of the United States, but he also had something more than that. He had a sense of values, of forces. That is why, when a man showed up at his headquarters, was ushered into his office, and announced, "I am Jean Laffite," he did not immediately have him taken out and shot. No; instead, he eyed the man keenly, nodded at him, and said to him:

"Sit down and talk. You have fifteen minutes. Then I will order your trial by military court for the following crimes—piracy, larceny, abduction, murder, and conniving with the enemy. On any single count, you can be sentenced to death."

They will tell you, down there, that on some of those counts Jean was guilty, but on others as innocent as a newborn babe. It is true, he was a pirate; not since the time of Henry Morgan had there been a pirate on so grand a scale; he elevated the profession, they will tell you. But murder—hardly. They will also impress on you that this Jackson was a hard man; look at the words that followed. The histories ignore the words, as they always do. All the histories say is that Jean Laffite spoke to Jackson for fifteen minutes and convinced him that the Baratarians could be of service—and Jackson accepted; just like that!

"It is true," Laffite began, "I am pirate. Circumstances make me pirate. Circumstances make you general."

"I don't grant the comparison," Jackson said.

"Naturally. Everyone say, what for that damn fool Laffite insist on helping American? Cost me maybe half million dollar already. Cost me very nice business down in Barataria."

"To save your neck," Jackson said.

"So? But British also want to save my neck. They make not one deal, but five. Jean—you can have this, or this, or this, or that. Sacred name of God, do I say I am not thief? Pirate? Large businessman in smuggled goods? All very true. But I tell you, Laffite is finished. Whoever win, the profession is no good now. So I talk a little bit about liberty and the rights of man."

"Talk quickly," Jackson said.

"When I am small child, I see the Bastille stormed. The citizens take up arms and go to die, and even as very small child, I wonder why. I hear about your Valley Forge, and I wonder why. I watch Napoleon—by God, that's one bad man, even if I got maybe his best gunners in my band—"

"His best gunners?" Jackson inquired.

"What then? Dominique, Captain of Artillery, Peter Vourage, Master of Guns, Jacques Mans, Maurice Fremont—but that is nothing. I talk about rights of man. I know whole story of your revolution, how bad they need guns, powder; what a shame, that is done, and I got five hundred guns, put away, dry—"

"With powder and shot?"

"With powder and shot," Laffite nodded. "I say to myself, do you look into soul and conscience of every man who fight with you? Only good men fight for liberty? How is

that, my general? You catalogue each one? Is it bad a tyrant should die with bullet from thief's gun, no? Or maybe it make man a little better he fight for freedom? Burr is traitor—he never steal five cents; Arnold never steal a penny. You ask to what is Laffite loyal and why? Maybe to a dream, my general."

"These gunners of yours," Jackson answered, "have they artillery?"

Laffite shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands. "It can be found. For all the men who can serve them, I assure you, there will be cannon enough."

"I offer no pardons," Jackson said.

"True—"

"When the danger is passed, I will be forced to order your arrest."

"Naturally."

"But now we can shake hands," Jackson said.

You can see that this took considerably less than fifteen minutes.

It is not our affair here to retell the story of the awful battle of New Orleans. That was the last time an enemy in any force set foot upon American soil, and God grant there will never be such a time again. There have been greater battles than that, but it is doubtful that there was ever one more terrible in the toll American arms took.

For when the battle finished, after two horrible hours, the enemy had lost two thousand six hundred men in dead, wounded, and prisoners; our loss was seven dead and six wounded. And with that battle, our long revolution was finished and a country made here in America.

But something should be noted. When Wellington's vet-

erans attacked our barricades, they expected rifle fire—yet the terrible toll was taken before they ever reached rifle range, by red-sashed, barefooted pirates under the command of Jean Laffite and Dominique You. They turned the tide of battle and made a victory out of defeat. They appeared for two hours on the stage of this country's history, served the guns, their golden ear-rings flashing, plunged home the ramrods, jammed in the grapeshot, and built in front of the American lines a wall of accurate, devastating artillery fire.

So the pirate chief came on the stage and left it. He is harder to trace after his moment of glory; in the roaring commerce of a new America, his enterprises collapsed, and even the people of New Orleans were inclined to smile a little at anything so romantic as red sashes and gold ear-rings. Two years later, the court records of Louisiana show a conviction and sentence to three years' imprisonment for one, J. Laffite. The crime was waylaying a Mississippi flat-boat loaded with casks of rum. So the mighty are fallen. It seems that when he came out of jail, he attempted to re-establish himself at Barataria, but the new Yankee administration was in no mood for anything so impractical as pirates, and in one month a police detachment ran him out and burned his hastily-contrived warehouses. Dominique You fatalistically accepted honest employment on a sailing vessel; and when Jean Laffite attempted to establish a small if somewhat illegal enterprise in New Orleans itself, a court order gave him just three days to leave the city and never again return.

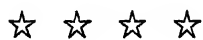
He drifted west to Galveston, and after a short residence there, got across the Mexican border just a few steps in front

of the sheriff. And in the lonely province of Yucatan, in Mexico, he died, forgotten, without glory or shouting.

They will tell you, down on the Delta, that he was born too late. "One hundred year earlier," they tell you, "that Jean Laffite, he is one great man."

4

Neighbor Sam





NEIGHBOR SAM

THE trouble started the day that young lawyer showed up. First it rained and then it cleared, and then it rained and then it cleared, all in four days, and nobody ever knew any good to come of something like that. And then Pa shot a wolf not more than two hundred paces from the house, when there hadn't been a wolf in the neighborhood in maybe two years. And, as if that wasn't enough, the well went dry.

"I never seen to beat that," Pa said. "I never seen a well go dry in such even weather, first rain, then shine, then rain."

"Either coax water out of it or dig a new well," Ma said.

"Not just a scratch well," Pa said. "Twenty feet deep, and I rocked up the sides."

Ma and Jenny and me, we got a rope and lowered Pa into the well. He mucked around in there for two or three hours, and when we pulled him up he was black from head to foot. But he hadn't coaxed out a drop of water.

"I got dishes to wash and greens to cook," Ma said, her

eyes narrowing. Pa nodded, and wiped some of the mud from his face; I guess he could see that Ma was already looking around and picking a spot for the new well.

Well, Pa was standing like that, full of mud and peevishness, when Matt Stevens rode up on his old mouse-colored mare. Pa and Matt had never got along since Pa decided against him last spring and awarded four sows in question to Jim Hogan. At that time, Matt called Pa an old idiot and said there wasn't much hope for a country that put the law into such hands as his. And ever since then he called Pa "Sam," instead of "Squire," like everyone else. Pa said Matt came from no-account folk who didn't know the meaning of respect.

"Now he ain't here for no good," Pa muttered.

Stevens leaned over his mare and grinned at Pa. He said, "Lord, that's a lot of mud, Neighbor Sam."

"Honest mud."

"Maybe so," Stevens nodded, still grinning.

"What's on your mind, Neighbor Stevens?" Ma asked. She knew that Pa and he had been spoiling for a fight ever since last spring, and now, the way Pa felt, she was anxious to be rid of Stevens quickly.

"Nothing—nothing. Just thought I'd stop by and pass the time of day."

Pa grunted.

"Thought you might not know about the new lawyer-man, being as how you're off the beaten track here."

Pa stared. There was no trouble now knowing why Matt Stevens had come by to pay a call.

"We ain't heard of any lawyer-man excepting the Squire, here," Ma said slowly.

"I reckoned you hadn't," Matt grinned. "Of course, this

feller's a mite different from the Squire, here. Just come into the village day before yesterday and took the old log house Frank Fellows built. Got it fixed up already and shingle hung out. Elmer Green, Counselor at Law. Parson Jackson been in to see him, and says he's a right smart young feller. Graduated out of Harvard. Got his degree framed up, and folks been going in and out all day to have a look at it. Got a desk and pen and ink and pile of paper that high. Got a row of law books that long." He spread his arms as far apart as they would go.

Pa stared at his hands, rubbing the mud down the length of his fingers. Ma said, "Can't see that it matters to us how many lawmen set up hereabouts." But I could see that Pa was worried. Twelve years now, since two months after I was born, Pa was the only lawman in this part of the country.

Not that Pa was a real lawman with a framed degree; but he was the sort of man other men looked up to. Twelve years past, when the Shawnees came down and burned out Zeke Cooly's farm and Aunt Elsie Hack's chicken run, Pa organized the defense at the fort. After that it wasn't any trouble for him to get the nomination for district judge, and every two years since then Pa was re-elected. In fact, the voting was just a formality; nobody had ever presumed to run against Pa.

But now I could see that Pa was hard hit, and you can be sure that what hit him hardest was Matt's description of a row of books about six feet long. Pa had a book; after he had been district judge four years, what with all sorts of fancy bits of law coming up, Pa decided that he didn't have enough law inside of his own head to handle everything. So, whenever anybody took a trip back east, Pa would say,

"Pick me up a lawbook somewheres, if you see one handy." There probably weren't many lawbooks handy, because it took nearly a year for one to come. But that was a fine book, all bound out in red leather with leafwork in real gold just covering it. People came in from all around to look at that lawbook for months on.

The only thing Pa had against that lawbook was the name on it. On the cover it said, "English Common Law." Pa didn't hold against the "common law" part, since he considered common law good enough for himself and his neighbors; but the "English" part was a bone in his throat. The war of the colonies against England had been going on for five years then, and Pa didn't consider it right to deal law out of an English book. But since there wasn't any other lawbook within two hundred miles, Pa just scratched out the English part on the cover. The law inside suited folks fine.

Pa stood there rubbing the mud off his hands, and Matt Stevens sat on his old gray mare, grinning.

Finally, Pa said, "Now, maybe I ought to go in and make a calling visit with that new lawyer. He and I ought to get together on common law and such, if he's planning to try cases in my court."

"I don't reckon he plans to," Matt said comfortably.

"How?"

"I don't reckon he plans to," Matt repeated, "seeing as how the election comes up soon, and how certain citizens of the community have asked him to run for district judge. They figure it ain't proper, calling an election without no contest. Also, they figure they might get a mite more law out of a Eastern lawman, with a degree all framed and

hung." He kicked at his mare, and called back, "Good luck, Neighbor Sam!"

"Good luck," Pa muttered.

"I never did see no good come out of Matt Stevens," Ma said.

"Rains one day, shines the next, kill a wolf on my own land, well goes dry, and now this."

"Pa," Jenny said, "Pa, don't go to worrying. Folks hereabouts aren't going to shuffle you out for any Eastern lawman."

"That's gospel," Ma nodded.

But Pa shook his head. His beard hung down against his chest, and he seemed old all of a sudden. He shuffled into the house.

I followed him and left Ma talking with Jenny. When I got into the house Pa was standing there with his book of common law, turning the pages slowly.

I sat down and waited for him to notice me. Finally, he said, "Hello, Jess."

"Lord, I don't know whether I hate Matt Stevens more than that new lawman," I said.

"Don't take the Name in vain," Pa said, "and shut about hating. It ain't Christian, Jess. I ought to tan your hide."

"Some day I'll get big enough to take a gun to Matt Stevens—"

But Pa didn't even hear me. He was staring at the law-book. . . .

Pa had almost finished digging the new well, when he decided he was going to stump for the election. Out here, on our side of the mountains, you didn't find much argument for elections; if you reckoned a man was good for some-

thing, you voted him in, and there were hardly ever two men good for the same thing. But back East stumping for votes was becoming popular, and Pa had read about it in newspapers, usually a month or two old.

But what really decided him to go stumping was Jenny. My sister Jenny had turned eighteen then, and both Ma and Pa were after her to find a man who would make a good provider. She was a catch, all right, even though I didn't think so; people said Squire Burton's daughter would know how to run a home and a man. But, every time a boy was calling, Jenny had this or that to say about him. Even though Ma told her that in no time at all she would be an old maid.

Well, Pa began to have his doubts when more and more people turned off to our house to speak about the new lawman. They were so full of bits of law he had let drop about that Pa got good and nervous, so nervous that even his gathering good, clear water in the new well didn't cheer him any. And then, when the well was almost finished, the lawman himself came calling.

He rode up one day on a sleek brown horse, with fat saddlebags, such as any proper lawman might carry. Pa was working on the well, but when he heard the hoofs he h'isted himself up. Then he saw the strange face, knew right off it was the lawman, and dropped back. Pa didn't want any truck with him.

The lawman dismounted and called to me, "Sonny, what's your name?"

I didn't answer, but spat over my shoulder. If Pa had been there he would have whacked me; but Pa was down the well.

The lawman smiled. "Squire Burton around?" he inquired.

"I don't see him," I said.

"He lives here, doesn't he?"

"Times when he does," I said. It was hard to stand up against that lawman. He had a nice, square face and blue eyes that sparkled with interest as they looked at you; but I had made up my mind not to like him, and Pa had always said I would grow up into a stubborn man.

Just then Jenny saw us from the house, and she came running out.

The lawman said, "How do you do, miss? My name's Elmer Green. I rode up here to pay my respects to Squire Burton. He lives here, doesn't he?"

"He lives here," Jenny nodded; but her eyes narrowed when she heard his name.

"Is he here?"

"He was a moment ago. Jess, you seen your Pa?"

"Not lately," I said.

"Then he isn't here, and you needn't wait," Jenny snapped.

The lawman turned his hat over and over in his hands. "Miss, I'm sorry if I offended you in any way. I aim to make friends here, not enemies."

"We don't need new friends. My father had enough friends until you came. It's people like you who ruin this land, coming here where my father worked all his life, to tear down what he built."

"That was not my intention, miss," the lawman said softly. "This is a democracy we live in. And the great and necessary thing to any democracy is free election with more than one candidate."

"My father judged this district well enough."

"Well enough, I agree with you," the lawman said. "And he'll continue to, probably. Only, this time people will choose between two of us—" They began to walk away from me, slowly. I stayed by the well.

Pa whispered, "Jess, did that lawyer go yet?"

"Not yet, Pa."

"Well, keep an eye peeled."

Pa stayed down that well at least an hour and a half. And it was drawing water, mind you. And all the time Jenny and the lawman sat in the shade of the house, talking. Jenny brought out some cold milk and some cake. Then the lawman mounted his horse.

"Tell Squire Burton I'll be around again," he called.

After he had got out of sight in the woods I said to Pa, "You can come up now."

Pa crawled up out of the well, muddy and soaking wet. Jenny came over and said, "My goodness, Pa, what were you doing down there all this time?"

"Looking for lizards," Pa snapped.

"I was talking with Elmer Green," Jenny said. "I like him."

Well, it was then and there that Pa made up his mind to stump for the election.

Pa put off the stumping until just two or three days before the election. That was because Ma put her foot down and said that he'd look like an awful fool, going around and asking friends to vote for him.

"Maybe they're friends," Pa said, "but there's that lawyer-man with six feet of lawbooks, and folks are already saying that what they've had six years now ain't American law, but English law. Matt Stevens, he's put it around

everywhere that there's a heap more law comes out of six feet of books than out of one book."

"And maybe they're right," Ma pointed out.

"What! By all that's mighty, my own wife's against me!"

"I ain't against you," Ma said calmly. "Only, one thing you got to remember—that for every case you tried there was a plaintiff and a defendant, and if you gave the case to the defendant, then the plaintiff went away stamping mad. And the other way round."

"A woman I been married and bedded with twenty-two years come June," Pa muttered.

"Well, it seems to me you ought to be satisfied with twelve years of lawgiving," Ma said.

Pa didn't speak to Ma about the election again, but I could see that he had taken what she said awful hard. Instead of going out to stump raring mad, he put it off from day to day. And all the while the lawman was stumping up and down the river. Twice, he came to the house to see Pa, but the only one he saw was Jenny. The first time, Pa went out to the stable and fed the stock two hours straight; the second time, he sat up in my attic room until I gave him word to come down. He sure was doubting what he might do to that lawman if they ever met.

And then, two or three days before election, Pa made up his mind to go out and stump. By that time I was the only one around the place who had any truck with him, he was so eaten up and burning about the lawman.

"Jess," he said, "saddle up the filly and the big white. We're going to take this election in hand."

When I had the horses ready I went into the house. Ma's

lips were tight and she wasn't speaking. She was putting together a bag of food for Pa to take with him.

"After all, I been judging this district twelve years," Pa said.

"And long enough. . . . Jess, you catch cold and I'll tan your hide good and lasting. . . . Don't know why you need the boy with you, anyway," she said to Pa.

"Don't know that I got anyone else," Pa snapped.

The first place we went was to the Joneses' farm, up the creek. Pa and Lancy Jones, they came out to this country together, fifteen years back.

Lancy was rooting stumps in a patch he was clearing when Pa hailed him. Lancy walked over and said, "'Evening, Squire."

"'Evening, Lancy," Pa said.

"Good weather," Lancy said.

"My well went dry," Pa told him. "Couldn't figure it nohow."

"Plenty of rain," Lancy said.

"Crop weather," Pa agreed.

"I already seen a well to go dry just out of pure contrarieness," Lancy Jones said.

"No telling at all."

"But that was a fine well."

"Mighty nice well," Pa said. "Twenty foot deep."

"Going hunting?" Lancy asked Pa.

Pa hesitated, glanced at me, and then tugged at his beard. "Deer," Pa said.

"I seen deer sign over at Lasting Hollow."

"Come on, Jess," Pa said. "Good day, Lancy."

"Good day."

When we were out of sight of Lancy's place I said to

Pa, "That was a mighty queer way to stump for votes."

"That's the way it's done back East," Pa muttered.

"I'd have asked him straight."

"Jess, you shut and don't be prying into affairs of your elders," Pa snapped.

We went on down the valley to where the Humphrieses had their place. It was ten miles, and by the time we got there night had settled down. Rand Humphries was an old river keel boatman, and he and his wife had built themselves a little cabin to spend the last of their days.

At the Humphrieses' it wasn't much different. Rand's wife made a bed for us in the attic, and Pa and Rand spent most of the evening talking about how much better it was in the old days. But if there was one thing Pa and Rand didn't talk about, it was the election.

We were up and off early the next morning. Pa said he kind of took to this stumping business and that he was just beginning to warm up to it. He said you just can't go to old friends and ask them to vote for you out and out; a man's pride wouldn't let him do that. You had to travel around the subject, this way and that way.

Well, Pa sure had a lot of pride. We rode the horses most to death paying calls, and Pa talked with a lot of people about 'most everything under the sun, about taxes and land speculation, and corn against oats as a crop, and the price of calico and lots more. But not about the election and not about votes.

"That's that," Pa said as we turned home. "I feel better now that I been out stumping."

"You ain't worried about the election now, Pa?" I asked him.

"Not a bit, Jess," Pa smiled. "You see, all them folks, well, they're old friends."

"That lawman, though, he's canny. You remember about that shelf of books."

"I ain't worried about them books, Jess. I reckon now that the war's over, folks won't mind a few more years of English common law."

We were near home when we met Matt Stevens. I was afraid that might mean trouble out here, but Pa was feeling so good he just grinned.

"'Evening, Matt," Pa said.

"'Evening, Sam."

"I guess you're ridin' into the village to do your voting," Pa said.

"I am. Heard you were out stumping, Sam?"

"Right up and down the valley," Pa said.

"You don't reckon you're late?" Matt grinned. "Elmer Green, he finished his stumping last week. Today and yesterday and the day before he's been out at your place courtin' Jenny."

"What!" Pa roared.

Matt rode off, still grinning.

Pa turned to me and said, "Jess, what do you figure he meant by that?"

"I guess that lawman's sweet on Jenny. I guess a blind man could have seen that. . . ."

Ma didn't give Pa any satisfaction. When he stamped around the house, roaring, combing his beard with both hands, she just turned her back on him. When he tried to take it out of Jenny, Ma told him, "That's about enough and too much, Sam Burton. Leave the girl alone. If you were home here, minding your business instead of traipsing

around the country pestering your friends, you wouldn't have reason to complain."

"Since that lawman came," Pa moaned, "one thing and another, and now my wife and daughter."

All that next day, which was Election Day, Pa mooned around, his face so black that nobody dared speak to him. But toward evening he cheered up a little. He said to me, "Jess, even if everything else has gone wrong, tonight I'll put that no-account young buck in his place. He'll see that he can't just walk in with his framed degree and take a district away from a man with friends."

The next morning Pa was up with the sun, intending to ride in and get the tally on the votes. He hadn't voted, himself, because he didn't consider it sporting to put down a vote for himself. Besides, he was so sure of the election that one vote didn't mean anything, one way or another.

Pa had saddled the horse, and he was having breakfast, when through the window we saw Lancy Jones ride up and dismount. Lancy came in and stood in the doorway, seeming nervous and ill at ease.

"'Morning, Lancy," Pa called. Pa was mighty cheerful today.

"'Morning, Squire."

"Going down to get the tally on the vote?" Pa asked him.

"Seems folks voted early," Lancy said. "Vote was all counted yesterday."

"Yesterday?" Pa paused, with a piece of hot bread half-way to his mouth.

"It kind of hurts for me to have to bring the news," Lancy said. "But twelve years is a long time to serve. This young Elmer feller, why, he's got a fine stock of good law

sense. Got a framed degree from one of them Eastern colleges, too. Not that we weren't satisfied with your way of doing things, Squire—"

Pa just shook his head; he shook it back and forth, like it was stuck on a spring.

"Now, Sam, don't excite yourself," Ma warned him.

"Lancy, who won the vote?" Pa whispered.

"Elmer Green, Squire."

"What count?" Pa whispered.

"Hundred ninety-seven to eighty-two."

Suddenly Pa sprang to his feet, knocking over his chair and pushing the table away from him. "You're a liar, Lancy!" he roared.

Lancy didn't move, but his face tightened. Quietly, he said, "Sam Burton, you know me twenty-four year, and you know I never took words like that from any man."

But Ma pushed Lancy through the door. "Go on now," she said. "Go on. The Squire ain't in any state fit to argue with." But after Lancy had left she turned to Pa and shook her head. "To say that to a friend," she murmured.

Pa sat down by the fireplace and put his face in his hands.

"Jess, go out and unsaddle the horse," Ma told me.

Pa sat like that by the hearth without moving until midday. Jenny and Ma and I went around him on tiptoe; we knew that after what Pa had said to Lancy there was no meddling with him or talking with him.

Well, it was about midday when we heard the sound of a horse outside. Ma went to the window, and I saw a funny expression fix on her face. She grabbed Jenny and pushed her through the door. I followed. Ma called, "Jess, you come back!" But I ran on after Jenny.

It was the lawman, calm as day, smiling, and dismounting right in front of our house.

"Elmer," Jenny cried, "you were crazy to come here today! Don't you understand how he feels?"

"He'll feel different after I speak to him," Elmer said.

"But you can't speak to him. Go away, please. In a week, or a fortnight, he'll feel different."

"And you'd want me to go away—for a fortnight?"

"No, no. Why are you twisting my words?"

"It's all right," the lawman smiled. "The only decent thing for me to do is to go in and speak with him, tell him. From what I've heard of him, that's what he'd want." And, with that, the lawman pushed past Jenny into the house.

I crowded after him. I didn't want to miss whatever happened. I saw Ma standing with one hand over her breast. Pa was still where he had been sitting before. Jenny stood by the doorway, trembling.

"Squire Burton," Elmer said.

Pa looked up. He saw the lawman, but I don't think he knew him from Adam right then. He just stared at him.

"Squire Burton," Elmer went on, "I'm truly damned sorry it had to happen this way. All I can say is that it was a free election. All I hope is that I'll be as worthy of the position as you were. Yet it isn't as if the judgeship were gone from the family—but shifted—" He paused and swallowed. "You see, I want to marry your daughter. I love her. She loves me—"

Slowly, Pa came to his feet. He shook his head several times and combed through his beard. I could almost see how the words were tumbling over and over in his head.

Ma must have seen it too, because she cried, "Pa, don't aggravate yourself!"

Pa exploded. A bearlike growl rumbled from deep in his stomach, and then he leaped for his long rifle, hanging over the fireplace. He tore it down. "Get out!" he told the lawman.

Elmer hadn't moved. He was watching Pa coolly, and now he said, "I would have given you my hand if I had lost."

"Get out!" Pa yelled.

The lawman moved quickly. I saw his hand dart out for the gun, and then the long rifle went off. The room was suddenly full of smoke and noise and flame. Jenny screamed.

I guess the lawman had been in the war back East, because now the gun was in his hands. Pa stood with his arms hanging loose, staring at Elmer. Jenny sobbed. Ma put her arms around Jenny.

"We'll go now," Ma said. "This ain't a fit place for decent folk."

Pa just stood there without stirring.

The lawman said, "Wait a minute, Mrs. Burton. Don't you think—?"

"I know what I'm doing, young man," Ma said. "He's gone from bad to worse. From just plain ranting, he's turned to murder. Come along, Jess, and you, Jenny."

Pa sank down by the hearth and put his head in his hands. Ma went around the house picking up all Pa's firearms, two pistols, a fowling piece, and a musket—that besides the long rifle. "Can't trust him with these," she said. Pa didn't move. Elmer tried to speak, but Ma shooed him out of the house. Then she called me. Jenny followed.

But Pa didn't move. . . .

We had gone perhaps a mile or two toward the village when I decided to slip back. Ma and Jenny were going to

put up with Parson Jackson, and Elmer kept trying to talk them out of it and into going back. But Ma was stubborn as a long night, and she said there'd be no going back, least-ways not until Pa came to his senses which she reckoned would be some time.

I felt it was bad enough, with all that had happened to Pa, without me leaving him, along with the others. So, without saying anything, I turned and started to run back.

Ma called after me, "Jess, where you going?"

But I think I heard Jenny say, "Let him go, Ma."

When I got back to the house, Pa was still sitting on a little stool by the hearth. He glanced up as I came in. "Hello, Jess," he said.

"Hello, Pa."

"They didn't send you back?" Pa asked me.

"No—I just come."

"Uh, huh," Pa nodded. "Just look how it is, Jess. A man should be humble toward life. There I was, Squire Burton, judging a district twelve years. Then it rains, shines, rains. Then I shoot a wolf, right on my own land. Then the well goes dry. Then there's election, and I ain't a judge, just because a young buck comes into the country with six foot of law books. Then I lose my wife. Then I lose my daughter. Didn't mean to shoot that young no-account, either. But he grabs the gun and it goes off, and there I am. Jess, know what I aim to do?"

"What, Pa?"

"Jess, I aim to get drunk—rolling, snorting drunk. Jess, I been a family man twenty-two year. Ain't tasted hard liquor in twelve, since they gave me the judgeship. But, Jess,

I ain't a judge no more, and I aim to get rolling, wild drunk. I always been a good family man, a good provider, but now I aim to get rolling drunk."

"I reckon it helps," I said.

"It's a sinful thing for you to see, Jess," Pa said. "But it seems to me I'm down and along the road to becoming a sinful man. It'll be a thing to remember and make you humble."

Pa had a jug of corn standing down the cellar for as long as I remember. When someone came who liked corn, Pa would pour out a glass or two, but it was a big jug, and there was plenty left. Now he fetched it up and set himself to drinking.

"Pa," I warned him, "better take it slow. Old Casper always said that, and he ought to know. I reckon Casper put away more corn than anyone hereabouts."

"I reckon he did," Pa said. "I reckon to overshoot his mark."

It was late afternoon now. Pa was tilting the jug on his shoulder and beginning to feel pretty good. He was singing, "Little brown jug, how I love thee—"

I went to the door and saw something, and slammed the door and barred it. I ran around the house, flinging the window shutters to and barring them.

"What's that, Jess?" Pa demanded.

I pointed toward a loophole in one of the shuttered windows. Pa rose, stumbled over, and looked. Then he staggered back, rubbing his face and pulling at his beard. Then he grabbed the jug of corn and shattered it against the hearth floor.

"The punishment of a sinful man! Mark me, Jess; sinful eyes seeing what ain't there."

"There's Shawnees there, all right," I said. I was beginning to feel good and scared now.

"Jess, I drank the corn, and you, in your innocence, smelled the vapors. There ain't been Shawnees in this part of the country for twelve years." He went to the window, looked, rubbed his eyes, and stared again. Then he came back slowly and sat down.

"Shawnees," he said. "Shawnees in war paint, Jess. And there ain't a firearm here—" He shook his head.

There was a hammering on the door. I began to sniffle, but Pa said, "Stop that, Jess."

One of them poked a musket into a loophole and fired; smoke and flame darted into the room, but we were out of the line. Another fired through a loophole. Both the rooms of the house were laced with smoke and pungent with the smell of gunpowder.

"Your ma, she always knew best," Pa said. "Twenty-two years she was always right, Jess, but this time she had no call taking away the guns."

They were hammering on the door again. The shutters were thick, of oak; and the door was thicker.

The room got heavier with smoke, hotter, closer. Then I heard a crackling, like a heavy man walking on dry brush in the forest.

"Jess," Pa said uncertainly, "Jess, they're burning down the house. We'd better go down in the cellar and pray to God he sent us Injuns so damn' ignorant they don't know what a cellar is."

The cellar was not built under the house, but off to one side. You went in a trap in the floor and then through a slanting shaft. It was unusually cold and wet, because a

spring oozed up out of it and ran off through a wooden drain. Most everyone had a cold cellar like that to keep roots and milk in, but it was hot in that cellar then. It had always been the coolest place in the world, but now it was as hot as if the devil were sitting in there with Pa and me.

Pa sat with his arm around me, muttering to himself. Like this: "First that crazy weather, rain, shine, rain, then the wolf, then the well goes dry, then I ain't a judge, then my wife and daughter, and now—now they burn down the house over my head."

I don't know how long we stayed in that cellar, but Pa wanted to give the house plenty of time to burn out and the Shawnees plenty of time to go away. Finally, when it got so we could barely breathe, Pa pushed up the trap and we came out.

The house was down, and we hopped over the black, smoldering logs. It was night, and the Shawnees had gone.

Pa looked at what had been his house, and then at what had been the barn. Then he looked at me and shook his head. "Jess, Parson Jackson would say I ought to give thanks, but I'm afraid I'm turning into a mean man, a mean man."

I said, "Pa, what about other folks hereabouts?"

Pa jumped like he had been hit. "Jess, I'm a fool. I got a lot to hold against Lancy Jones, but I won't see his house burn over his head."

It was eight miles to Lancy Jones's place, but we made it in less than two hours, on foot. I could see that Pa was steamed up, and when Lancy put an old musket into his hands, Pa seemed to have forgotten all about the house burning down.

From Lancy's place we went down the valley, pulling

in men left and right. I don't know what had happened to the Shawnees, but Pa said that after all the work of burning down a house, they were like to throw themselves into the grass and sleep it off, like some men do a corn-whisky jag.

Pa took charge of everything, and in no time at all he had it in hand. Women and children in carts and wagons and headed down to the village, which was no more than a blockhouse and half a dozen shacks, men to guard them, men to ride up and down the valley and warn outlying farms.

I guess it was the same as it had been twelve years past, when the Shawnees came the first time. Everybody "Squired" Pa to death, and nobody seemed willing to do anything without asking him first. And by midnight he had them all down in the village. And nobody ever said a word about the lawman. . . .

Pa and I were among the last to get into the village. Pa kept pestering me to go, but I stuck by him, both of us riding Lancy's big, white work horse. And when we got into the village Ma and Jenny were almost frantic. I guess Ma had repented plenty about walking off with all the fire-arms.

Ma tried to get around Pa and kiss him and hug him, so she could show him how sorry she felt; but Pa was busy and he couldn't have any truck with women.

Then Ma and Jenny took to kissing me, but Pa said, "The place for women and kids is over there in church, singing hymns with Parson Jackson."

Ma was close to tears, but she nodded and started to walk away. Jenny said, "Come along, Jess."

"The devil I will," I said.

Pa fetched me a wallop. "Jess," he said, "for a boy who's seen the rewards of sin, you sure talk awful loud."

Ma came back. "Sam Burton," she snorted, "that's a fine way—to hit a boy who's been through all he's been through."

"I might have known," Pa said. "Everything else, and now Jess."

"Don't you talk like the fool you are, Sam Burton," Ma cried. Then she bent her head, so that he wouldn't see her tears.

"Sarah," Pa said, "you ain't never been in tears before—and we been married twenty-two years, come summer."

"There's a start for everything."

"I had justice on my side," Pa said.

"Maybe you did. But I had the same kind of justice on mine."

Then they stood there, just looking at each other. Then, who should come walking up but the lawman. Pa saw him, out of the corner of his eye, and I looked for fireworks to start. But Pa never moved, and Ma never took her eyes off his face.

"Squire Burton," the lawman said, like he had practiced the speech over and over, "I feel there's a lot to explain and a lot to apologize for."

"Ain't nothing to explain," Pa said, "except why you're here instead of up there in the blockhouse, sitting over your gun. For a man who's done fighting back East, you're sure mighty slow in covering orders."

And Jenny said, "Elmer, you do what Pa says. . . ."

Well, the Shawnees didn't come that night. I went to the church to do hymn singing, but I didn't sing much. I fell

asleep, and slept right through until almost noon the next day. Then I learned that Pa and Lancy and others had been back to our place, picked up the Shawnee track, discovered there weren't more than five or six of them. They had gone back across the river.

Pa said he reckoned it was safe enough now, and folks were beginning to load up to go back to their farms. But before any of them left they gathered around Pa to shake his hand and show him how sorry they were for voting against him.

"Well," Pa said, "it looks like I got to go back and build up again, and that's a tiresome thing for a man at my age."

Everyone nodded, but Lancy said, "Listen here, Squire; we been talking things over last night about how you served the public twelve years. Young Elmer here, he said as how they're going to make a state out of the section hereabouts and up and down two, three hundred miles. Well, when you got a state, you got to have a man to send to Congress, and it seemed to us there wasn't no better man to have sitting in Congress for us than Squire Sam Burton."

Pa stared at them, then looked all around the crowd, from face to face. Everyone was nodding.

"Never had but one lawbook," Pa mumbled. "Up there in Congress—"

"A man who could read law to a whole district out of one book wouldn't have any trouble in Congress," Parson Jackson said.

Ma was wiping her eyes. She went over to Pa and put her head against his shoulder. He ran his hands through his beard.

"You'll have to stump the district," Elmer said.

Pa grinned and put an arm tight around Ma. "Don't you worry about that, youngster. I'm an old hand at stumping."

5

Conyngham





CONYNGHAM

IT WAS a young, blue-eyed Irish-American with the curious name of Gustavus Conyngham, who in the latter part of 1777 decided to become a navy, became one, and made himself and his crew the terror of the North Sea, the English Channel, the Bay of Biscay, and the Eastern Atlantic. You won't find his story in the histories, not even his name. He sewed his own Stars and Stripes out of petticoats and shirts, while a harried, frantic Congress wrangled about the creation of a navy, while Washington's army starved and froze in Valley Forge, and while the American Revolution appeared about to flicker out, stillborn.

And then he appointed himself a navy, and calmly went about the task of wiping enemy shipping from the seas.

It's not quite certain where Conyngham came from, but in America in those times it didn't matter a great deal. A man was measured by what he was; Conyngham was young, handsome, reckless, and in a quiet way, a patriot—which meant he believed in freedom and hated oppres-

sion. He didn't talk about it too much, but when the thirteen colonies declared for Independence, he picked his side and looked around for a way to make himself useful. Knowing something about sailing a boat, he decided he'd be more useful in the navy than in the army—only the navy, for the most part, was still on the drawing boards. And the captains' list was a scramble of ambitious and none too competent men, with the best of the lot, John Paul Jones, almost at the bottom.

Conyngham didn't complain. He kept looking around, and when he had exhausted all possibilities, he sailed for Holland in the supply ship *Charming Betty*. Holland was friendly toward the American colonies, and there were plenty of boats in Holland; he trusted he'd pick up something to serve his purpose. However, Holland suddenly remembered that she was a neutral, and not only clamped down on her own vessels, but held the *Charming Betty* from returning to America. Stranded and with no prospect of obtaining a ship, Conyngham wandered down into France. His money was running out, but he had heard that in France an old gentleman by the name of Ben Franklin was getting things done. If he could have a word with Franklin—

The French were nice; they were lovely people and they liked Americans, but they succeeded in keeping him away from Franklin. They explained that Dr. Franklin was a very important man, very busy; and Conyngham's money was gone. He was on short rations and his clothes were becoming frayed, his nerves too. He tossed his last franc, on whether to return to America as a seaman or stay in France. France won, and he went into a tavern for a bottle of wine. As the last franc went across the counter, Conyngham

heard a voice speaking English, and a moment later he was shaking hands with an American and inviting the other to share his bottle. And then, when they sat down at a table, Conyngham was informed that the man opposite him was one of Dr. Franklin's agents.

Silently thanking God, Conyngham crossed his fingers, turned on his charm, of which he had plenty, and ordered two more bottles of wine—which he couldn't pay for. In an hour, Franklin's agent loved him, and in two hours they were discussing the naval future of the thirteen colonies.

"I want a boat," Conyngham said. "Any boat, anything that will sail."

"Boats," the agent shrugged. "Do you think the French give boats away?"

"A lugger, a cutter, a sloop—anything," Conyngham pleaded.

"Who are you?" the agent protested. "Who has heard of Conyngham?"

"Only give me a chance and you will all hear of me," the boy pleaded. Then he ordered more wine.

In another hour, the agent began to soften. "We have no navy," he said with tears in his eyes.

"That," Conyngham pointed out, "is why I want a boat."

"We will see Dr. Franklin," the agent capitulated. And they left the tavern, Conyngham grinning like an imp, the agent paying the bill.

The next day Conyngham went out to see his boat. He had convinced the agent and he had convinced Franklin, and as a result he was now the master of a twelve-gun lugger called the *Surprise*. He stood on the wharf and looked down at it; the ironwork was rusty and the paint peeled

from the boards. The sails were yellow and torn, and probably her bottom was foul. But Conyngham looked at her happily, and whispered:

"My beauty—my beauty."

It took him some time to get a crew, stranded Americans, Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutch, a few Spaniards. He found a carpenter and a sailmaker, and one day he came down to the wharf with his arms full of red petticoats and blue shirts. After careful instructions, the sailmaker put together two flags, and after they had been run up on the masts, Conyngham gave his instructions to his crew:

"We have twelve guns. We attack anything up to twenty guns." Conyngham never complicated things. He became a navy, and launched himself on a career that for audacity and sheer recklessness remains almost unmatched in all naval history; and for the first time the Stars and Stripes became known and respected in European waters.

Young Conyngham and his crew sailed boldly into the Channel, looking for prey with the coasts of France and England in full sight. Since Boulogne was a Channel port, he might have followed the course of most raiders and coasted to the larger safety of the North Sea or the Atlantic, but he wanted ships and decided the Channel was the place to find them.

Hardly more than hours had gone by before a brig, flying enemy colors, was sighted off the Isle of Guernsey. Without waiting to count the guns she carried, Conyngham bore down on her and boarded while the Island forts blazed away impotently. With that first victory he established his style of fighting—attack and count the guns later.

They were still counting the spoil of the brig and herding

prisoners below, when Conyngham told his first officer, Harding, that they were going to land on the island and see what they could pick up.

"But the forts," Harding protested.

"Damn the forts," Conyngham said, unwittingly establishing another precedent for the navy.

That night the *Surprise*, which had lived up to her name, sent the ship's boat to shore, and Conyngham returned triumphantly with the lieutenant and adjutant of the fort, whom his party had intercepted returning from a rabbit hunt. There was rabbit pie that night to celebrate.

Twenty-four hours after they took the brig, the lookout spotted another vessel and Conyngham ordered chase. This time it was the French third officer who pleaded that the American think twice.

"Why?" Conyngham demanded.

"Because, Monsieur, it is King George's mail packet."

"So much the better. It'll be worth something."

"But, Monsieur, no one has ever dared to stop the mails. The French are not at war."

"But I am," Conyngham grinned.

"And will you bring her into a French port?"

"That I will," Conyngham said. The French officer shrugged and spread his arms wide in despair.

Meanwhile, the *Surprise* had been bearing down on the packet, which, in its home waters, sailed along gaily and unsuspectingly. Again Conyngham's men boarded in a rush without stopping to count the guns. The packet had been sailing along, wrapped in the fancied security of the mails, so that it was taken almost before it had an opportunity to speculate on the strange red and white striped banner that flew from the *Surprise's* masthead; and Conyngham

and his men, pistols in hand, burst into the main cabin while the British officers were uncertainly rising from their tea.

And afterwards Conyngham said, somewhat bewilderedly: "I spent months looking for my first ship, and here I've got two in as many days."

The British did not take this interference with the King's mails lying down. They let out a furious uproar, condemned Conyngham as a pirate, and demanded that he be imprisoned and sent to England for trial—a trial which could only end in his being hanged. The British ambassador informed the French government in no uncertain terms that while the two countries were not at war, they might be soon unless such outrages stopped.

Thus, hardly had Conyngham sailed his two prizes victoriously into Dunkirk, when a French police officer boarded the *Surprise* and said to him:

"It grieves me, Monsieur, I am sorry, I apologize—but you are under arrest."

"Arrest?"

"Monsieur, we are not at war with England. I am sorry—those are my orders."

They took him to jail, and the jailer expressed his gratification at meeting the already famous Captain Conyngham. Nothing would be spared to make him comfortable.

They put him in their best cell, brought him a magnificent meal, a bottle of wine, and change of clothes—and after an hour the mayor of Dunkirk waited upon him in person. They were all terribly sorry; the worst of it was that the mail packet had already been returned to King George.

That night was Conyngham's worst. It seemed to him that in spite of the Franco-American friendship, his plan of declaring war on the enemies of his country singlehanded was doomed to sudden and inglorious failure, and that his career would come to a sudden end on an English gallows. And then, at the break of dawn, came a messenger from the venerable Dr. Franklin.

"We've arranged for you to escape," the messenger informed him.

"How?"

The messenger smiled and held up the key to the cell. The jailer smiled and looked placidly in another direction; and as they left the jail, doors somehow opened and guards slept soundly.

When a British sloop sailed into Dunkirk harbor to take Conyngham back to England, the mayor spread his hands wide and told the officers:

"It is sad, but that Conyngham is a devil. He has escaped us." An hour before the mayor had had dinner with Conyngham and told him: "Monsieur, you must hide."

"Hide! I must find a ship."

"You are mad. Anyway, you must disguise yourself."

So Conyngham bought a pair of glasses, perched them on the end of his nose, and went snooping around the Dunkirk waterfront for a vessel to suit his taste. His fame had already spread through Dunkirk, and everywhere townsfolk greeted Monsieur Conyngham cordially. It got to the ears of the British and they buzzed at the Mayor, who called Conyngham and pleaded:

"Monsieur, hide or leave Dunkirk. Now I must be firm."

"I shall leave Dunkirk," Conyngham agreed pleasantly.

The brig, his first prize, had not been returned to the enemy, and there was enough money from its sale to purchase a beautiful new cutter that lay in the harbor. "In my own ship," he added.

The mayor's face went red with horror at the thought of what the English would say if Conyngham went privateering out of Dunkirk in a French ship. "Impossible!" he decided.

"But I've already ordered provisions to be delivered on board tomorrow," Conyngham protested.

"And tomorrow a guard goes on board to prevent her from sailing," said the mayor, delivering his ultimatum.

Conyngham shrugged and nodded, and that night rounded up his crew and sailed the cutter out of the harbor. She was trim, small, but fast. Standing proudly at her helm, Conyngham told Harding:

"I'm going to call her the *Revenge*."

"Why?"

"For one thing, there was a British vessel of that name that was a fine fighting craft; for another, I'm going to pay them back for that mail packet."

"And provisions?" Harding asked.

"The first British merchantman will take care of that," Conyngham grinned.

For all his youth, his recklessness, and the offhand manner he went about commerce raiding, Conyngham was playing for keeps. To Franklin he had been a wild boy who might do the enemy some harm; to the French he was the sort of laughing fool they loved; to America and the Continental Congress, he was utterly unknown; to his crew he was a beloved if insane leader. Yet Conyngham was no fool;

he was a born sailor, a clever captain and an utterly fearless fighter. He ran up the Stars and Stripes at a time when they were a completely unknown quantity and he defied the mightiest seafaring power on earth; he became in himself a navy, feared, hated, respected.

He ranged through the Bay of Biscay, and when he sighted a sail, he never stopped to count the guns, and his prizes sailed into obscure French and Spanish ports in a steady stream. East Indiamen, brigs, luggers, sloops—all were his legitimate prey. At that time, the American Revolution needed money and financial backing more than anything else; there was no money to spare for Franklin and the diplomatic corps he had with him in France. Franklin, racking his wits for funds, was astounded when the prize money began to pour in from Conyngham's raids. There were thousands and then tens of thousands and then hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Three months went by, and all the coast of France, Spain and Portugal came to know that strange striped banner that flew over the *Revenge*. King George roared with rage, and the admiralty sent a frigate to hunt Conyngham down. Conyngham helped in the hunt, picked up the frigate, and merrily sailed circles around her with the little *Revenge*, and then took a prize right under her nose. The frigate's commander was dropped to the bottom of the captain's list, and the admiralty sent out a squadron. Again the tiny *Revenge* led them a fantastic chase, sailed circles around them, and led them into shoals off the Spanish coast where the bottom was ripped out of a brig. Another squadron was sent out, but the *Revenge* sailed away, took three prizes, and brought them safely into port.

Thumbing his nose at the mightiest fleet in the world,

Conyngham sailed into the Channel and took prize after prize, while incredulous spectators watched from the coast of France and the Dover Cliffs. Then he sailed north and smashed English commerce with Holland.

He raced two frigates around the Shetland Islands, and left a trail of captured and wrecked ships down the Atlantic to the Azores. He became a myth, a legend, a demon, and he gave a navy still building a reputation that was to last untarnished until today. He himself was wounded half a dozen times; Harding was killed; his crew was decimated so many times that only a fraction of the original men were left, but his reputation made it easy for him to find replacements. Time after time, the little *Revenge* was shattered half to pieces, her decks running with blood, her masts splintered; yet always, through luck and seamanship, she managed to slip away and limp into some neutral port for repairs. And then she would be off again on one of her mad cruises.

As her toll of ships taken mounted, twenty, thirty, forty, then fifty, Conyngham's name became more and more known. All over Europe they were speaking of him, and if someone asked, "This new republic in America, has it a navy?" someone else would reply, "Conyngham, of course."

There were bad moments. Once he took a full broadside from a frigate, and the *Revenge* lay becalmed like a shattered wreck. A storm saved him then. Another time he lost half his crew in one terrible battle boarding an armed East Indiaman. But he had the last say; he drove British shipping from European waters, and as the masts stood like a forest in their harbors, they turned from their fleet to diplomacy. Soon, Conyngham found himself and his ship barred from every port in France and Spain.

He shrugged and accepted the fact; he was homesick anyway. More than a year had gone by, and he had taken over fifty prizes and had sunk more than twenty other vessels.

Crossing the Atlantic, he livened the voyage by capturing two more merchantmen. The second of them had led him far southward, and he yielded to the temptation of the rich commerce that plied the Caribbean. Cautiously, he nosed into Havana, discovered that news of his ill repute with the Spanish government had not yet penetrated there, and took on stores and ammunition.

It took only a few weeks for news to spread through the West Indies that Conyngham was loose there. They didn't bother to send frigates or ships of the line after him; instead British shipping fled to the safety of port, and after taking half a dozen prizes, Conyngham gave it up and sailed home.

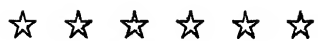
In February, in 1779, he took his ship up the Delaware to Philadelphia. News of his coming had preceded him, and for the first time he saw striped red and white and blue flags that were not his own tattered battle banners. He discovered he was a hero, the idol of his country; he was carried on the shoulders of a crowd, and his picture was everywhere. He was feted and dined.

But somehow, that was all; his day had passed. His country had got over the edge of defeat, and from the drawing boards, a navy had become reality and sailed out to make the striped banner known in every corner of the world.

Conyngham was forgotten; even his name isn't in most histories. But the spirit that led him and his little *Revenge* is not forgotten; it still lives.

6

The Brood





THE BROOD

HE WOKE, looked into the hot sun, then closed his eyes and sought the dark restfulness of sleep. But the sun burned through his lids; awake, he heard a thousand noises that were not there before. He gave up sleep, and came alive as he always came alive at the beginning of a day. He came alive not as himself, but as the oldest of the brood. As himself, he had almost no identity; as one of the brood, he was one of six scrambling, squabbling, jealous bits of life.

As himself, he was a boy of thirteen, tall, gangling, skinny, ugly. A bony, sheepish face; bony hands that did the wrong thing instinctively, that invited blame.

As of the brood, he was Jim, the oldest. His sister, Jenny, was a year younger; his brother, Ben, nine; his brother, Cal, eight; his sister, Lizzie, six; the baby, Peter, was fifteen months, stub of the brood.

He, Jim, became awake—to sound, to light, to consciousness of time and distance. Time and distance stretched out, and always eighteen sway-backed covered wagons were his world. In that world he lived, fought, bickered, slept, and

waked. Past and future were as nothing; for only intermittently did he think of the place where they had originated, and hardly at all of the vague place to which they were going. That it was the year eighteen seventy-two meant little to him; that the purple haze on the western horizon was the hump of the continent, the Rocky Mountains, meant even less. The world was within the circle of wagons, and that was all the world.

Becoming awake that way, to heat, to smells of cooking, he felt the contact of his sister Jenny's ribs pressing his elbow. He jabbed with his elbow, felt his sister twitch out of sleep, jabbed again, and heard her offended cry.

"You lemme alone!" she screamed.

He sat up, a smirk on his long, sun-splotched face, his lips pursed and whistling: "Oh! Susanna, oh don't you cry for me—"

Jenny kicked out. He rolled her over, went on with his whistling. He became aware of his mother's approach, a big woman, large of bone, of hand and foot. She carried the baby, and she walked strangely, bent almost double. There was a reason for the crouched walk, and for a moment it drove all else from Jim's mind, leaving only the world he knew, the world of eighteen wagons that had moved constantly westward, but now moved no longer; the world that had thrown itself into a circle, a wall of wagons, a shelter pit in the center, an enemy outside. Jim thought of the enemy, the brown enemy, the painted enemy, of arrows that quivered loosely in sandy soil. Thoughts of the enemy mingled with plans and devices for outwitting his sister. He forgot the enemy and continued his whistling.

"Maw, he's hittin' me again."

He whistled calmly.

"Stop that whistling!" his mother ordered. She put down the baby. It was early morning, but already her face showed lines of weariness.

"He hit me," Jenny said.

"She's a liar." The words came out instinctively, with a rush, and his face assumed the sheepish look that was a confession. They would all be against him. If he hadn't hit her, she would have plagued him until he had. Regardless of what he did or didn't do, it was wrong. The oldest of the brood, he was bound by it. His lanky, awkward body incurred their derision, not their respect. In that moment, he hated them.

"Jim! Jim, don't you call nobody a liar, or I'll lick the livin' daylights outta you." His mother sighed, sank to the ground. She was a tall woman, too tall for the shelter pit. All day under the hot sun she had to crouch and hide the length of her body.

"Maw, look, he hit me here."

Other bits of the brood had come to life. "I seen him," Ben said, joining in the argument.

"Stop that whistling!" She slapped him.

He kicked out of the blankets and stalked off. Clothed, but barefoot, he had slept. He took pleasure in the fact that he wouldn't be ordered to wash, to dress. The slap still stung, and he made up his mind that Ben would feel the weight of his own hand.

"Bend your head!" his mother ordered.

His sister Jenny was laughing.

He stood defiantly erect. That way, erect, he stood too high. His head rose above the edge of the scooped hole that housed their world, that had been their world for two days now. His head was high enough for him to see beyond the

boundary of fresh-piled dirt, for him to see the eighteen long, canvas-covered wagons, drawn into a circle and chained wheel to wheel, for him to see the men who lay under the wagons, between the wheels, guns held.

"Jim, you—get your head down!" his mother cried.

Jenny made a face. "Too tall for his own good, ain' he, Maw?"

"Jim, you come back here!"

He stood wavering, shamefaced, hot about his ears, conscious of smiling glances from many other families in the pit, hating the brood he was a part of.

"Jim!"

He shuffled back. The hot, fresh-turned dirt of the pit broke between his toes. He came back to the brood with his head bent. Jenny made faces. Lizzie grinned at him with impish satisfaction.

"Never seen a boy like you," his mother sighed. "Never seen a boy to make his mother's life a trial."

"What I done?" he demanded.

Jenny cried: "He don' know, Maw. Jus' listen, he don' know."

"Shut up!" Jim cried.

His mother's hand stung on his face. She thrust a pail at him. "See you don't spill the water," she told him.

Pail in hand, he started across the shelter pit. He kept his head erect, defiantly, glancing eagerly at the linked wagons, at the sweat-soaked men who lay beneath them, rifles in hand, at the sweep of yellow, sun-dried prairie beyond, at the hazy mystery of the landscape where the enemy waited. He indulged in generous self-pity, seeing himself there with the men, wounded, hero-like.

His mother's voice came after him, "You, Jim—get your head down!"

Close to the center of the shelter pit, sunk into the earth and covered with canvas, was all that remained of the water, some eight barrels. Other boys were there waiting, pails in hand, ill-at-ease members of broods, conscious of a gawky, adolescent uselessness; more vaguely conscious that they were sent here because their mothers feared to face the diminishing water supply.

Mr. Johnson, one arm in a sling, his long mustache drooping and sorrowful, dispensed the water. He dipped it out of a barrel with a quart dipper, allowing a quart a day for each member of each family. It was little enough, yet too much, and his hand shook like a miser's as he poured the water. A thousand times he had counted the quarts of water in camp.

The boys crowded around him, asking questions, jostling one another, able to stand erect because here the pit was deeper, but trying to give the impression that they would have stood erect anyway.

"Expect attack soon, Jack?"

"Reckon that wound hurts?"

He poured the water carefully, gently.

"How about a little drink, Jack?"

He looked down his mustache with scorn, poured the water.

"How about the cavalry, Jack? How come they ain' here?"

"How come you all talk so much?" he demanded.

Jim's turn came. "Seven," he said. He tried to look important. That was a big family; not many families could demand seven quarts of water.

Johnson poured the seven quarts.

"My, it looks cold," Jim said. "My, I'd like to have one little drink."

"You'd cheat on the water," Johnson said shortly.

Jim flung a hand at the men beneath the wagons. "Them out there—they got plenty drinkin'."

"Maybe you'd like to be out there?"

"Maybe I would."

Johnson spat his contempt, and Jim felt the red burn about his ears. He turned and started back, holding the heavy pail with both hands.

Johnson called after him, "Mind that water gets to your maw!"

The boys laughing, Johnson's mournful mustache hiding his contempt, the hot sun, the dust, the close contact of eighteen families in the narrow boundaries of the pit, his sister Jenny running toward him, warning shrilly that water was slopping over the edge of the bucket, dancing around him—

"Leggo my hand!" he cried.

His mother: "Jim—be careful!"

Then he fell, and the water swirled out into a loose splotch of brown mud, over himself, over his sister. He rose awkwardly, red hot, bitter, conscious that every eye in the pit was upon him. He picked up the empty pail and looked into it. He raised his eyes and saw his mother approaching him.

There were no words he could say. He stood stock still, holding the bucket, until he felt the bulk of his mother's presence.

She said slowly, "Seven quarts of water—"

Every eye in the shelter pit was upon him, yet he felt alone in an immensity of sun-baked prairie, unprotected, too big for himself, all hands and feet and flushed neck.

"A day's water," his mother said.

"I'll go back. Maybe Mr. Johnson—"

"You won't go back. We'll do without."

He looked up at his mother, choked in his throat and his chest, wanting to cry, yet unable to cry. Then he turned and walked across the pit. Eyes followed him; no words, but turning eyes all the short way, past Johnson and the water barrels, past three graves with wooden crosses over them, past seven wounded men, who lay under a bit of canvas.

For a long time he sat with his back against the loose-dirt side of the pit, his knees drawn up, hands about them, bare feet plucking at the ground, the sun burning down and turning his neck a brighter red. The life of the pit went on and ignored him. The sun beat down. Breakfast was cooked and eaten. Water was hoarded and sipped. His lips became dry and cracked, his throat tight and sore. He longed for anything to happen, for attack, for rescue, for obliteration. His self-pity grew and swelled. His hatred for the brood increased.

At last he saw his mother coming toward him, bent over as she walked, carrying a plate of beans and a cup of water. She came up to him and held out the water.

"I ain' thirsty," he said.

"Drink it." Her voice was almost gentle.

He pursed up his lips and began to whistle: "Oh! Susanna, oh don't you cry for me—"

She opened her mouth, as if to say something, as if to lash him with the usual torrent of words, then left the words unspoken, stared at him as if she were seeing him for the

first time, seeing something beyond the bony awkwardness of him. There was something like satisfied relief in her eyes.

She nodded, then placed the cup of water and the plate of beans on the ground beside him. As she walked away, his dry, broken whistling followed her: "I've come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee—"

Slow time and slow passage of the sun overhead. The heavy juice of the beans dried out, and their skins cracked. The water in the cup became cloudy with dust. The animation of the pit disappeared. Women and children were waiting. For two days now, they had crouched behind their wall of wagons, waiting. One quick, furious attack had left seven wounded and three dead. Since then they had waited—for attack, for rescue, for hope, for death. The sun swung, as on a tight-drawn rubber band.

He was very hungry, even more thirsty. Again and again, he looked down at the beans and water. He whistled until his lips were too dry for the sound to emerge, and then he sat with his cracked lips drawn tight.

The sun hung above them, then started its long sway to the other side of the world. Tiny shadows lengthened. Exhausted, parched, the people of the pit lay still. Only the wounded moaned sometimes, and sometimes those who had their dead wept for them.

His brother Ben crept across to him once. Jim ignored him.

"Spilled seven quart water," Ben said.

Jess pursed his lips to whistle.

"Seven quart."

"You git," Jim whispered, his voice hoarse with hate.

"Seven quart," Ben grinned. Then he crept away.

Tiny, swarming flies settled on the beans. Ants fought for their share. Jess felt the painful kneading of his stomach.

The shadows were longer when he picked up the cup of water, held it carefully, and slipped over the edge of the rifle pit. He crawled slowly, balancing the water, moving between staked horses and oxen. That way, he made a circuit of six or seven wagons before he saw his father.

Before, always before, his father had been of the brood, part of the brood, a man whose heavy-skinned hands changed slowly from a tight grasp of plow handles, to ax handles, to rake handles, a tired man sitting at a table and eating great quantities of food, not a man for love or violent passions. He had pictures of his father that went far back; but always the pictures were the same—a middle-size man plodding behind a plow, a middle-size man harnessing horses. In the same way that he resented his brothers and sisters, he had resented his father, as if he recognized his father's disappointment in his first-born. His father was a man of few words; but often, very often, Jim had felt his heavy hand on head or body.

So now he puzzled, wondered at himself, carrying a cup of water to his father.

And this father was different, a father braced against a wagon wheel, with a rifle thrust through the spokes. A motionless father, lying in the wagon's shadow.

With the cup of water held in front of him, Jim watched his father, the water so close to his nose that he could smell the warm, soured odor of it. He watched his father, seeking movement, seeking signs that would explain the vague relationship he held to this man, origin of the brood, reasons

for their westward passage, reasons for the alien, hateful bits of flesh that were his brothers and sisters.

The sun was hot, but so immersed was he in the new manifestation of his father that he forgot the sun's heat, that he forgot his thirst and hunger, that he forgot his hate and resentment of the world about him. Slowly he was discovering ties that bound him to the man, was reaching back for them.

He watched his father's movement, watched an arm stretch, saw a leg ease itself from a cramped position, saw a ripple of undulation travel through the whole body. The other men talked occasionally, in short, terse sentences; but his father lay there in silence.

He wanted to crawl forward toward his father, yet something held him back, the same thing that kept him wordless when his mother came with water and beans. For the first time in all his life, he felt a sudden, awful pity for his father, for his mother.

Then he saw it, far out on the prairie—dust and through the dust men emerging. And he knew instinctively what it was, what the two days of waiting had been for. Not moving, not afraid, clutching the cup of water in his hand, he lay there and watched the line of dark men on small horses charge the circled wagons. He watched them come out of the dust like bathers breaking from the surf, heard their shrill screams, and saw them break against the rifle fire as against a solid wall.

After that, the fight might have been hours or minutes. He didn't know—as if his life had been suspended for that time, to be resumed again. He saw the changing positions of his father's body as he aimed and fired, and he felt with his father for the brood that lay in the shelter pit—fear,

anxiety. He aimed with his father, fired with the toil-hardened hands, saw the dark riders come to the edge of the wagons again and again, beaten back on their rearing horses, screaming, charging, racing along the wagons, hurling slim lances. Bullets kicked sand into his face, and once an arrow sank quivering into the ground beside him, within an inch of his elbow.

He saw his father struck, saw the arrow quivering up from between his neck and shoulder, felt the rending, hot pain of it, as if it had been in his own flesh.

He crawled forward, still holding the cup of water. The water was dirty and yellow. Sand lay on the bottom of the cup. Dust made a film over the water.

His father had rolled over, lay on his back. Jim's bare foot came in contact with the rifle barrel, and he felt the heat of it. It came as a surprise to him that he should be able to feel anything like that now.

His father looked at him, wide, hurt, surprised eyes. "You—Jim," he managed to say, "how come you're out here?"

Even now, knowing that death had taken hold of the man, sensing the thousand things left unsaid that should have been said, Jim was unable to bridge the gap with words. "I brung you some water."

"Out here—it ain' fit for you to be out here."

Strangely, he had no desire to cry; he knew he would never cry again. "I reckoned you'd be thirsty," Jim said.

"Thirsty?"

"A little water to drink," Jim said.

He put down the water, carefully, in his mind a picture of the seven quarts he had spilled that morning. He got an arm under his father's shoulders, and with an effort, raised him a little. He saw the pain cross his father's face.

"Hurts?"

"Maybe a mite, Jim." He twisted his head, so as to look beyond the wagons, and saw that the fight was over, that the lean riders had gone, leaving behind them a few riderless horses, a few dark, twisted bodies. "Maybe a mite, Jim," he repeated.

"I brung some water."

Pain again. "I could stand a little drink of water, Jim."

He held the cup to his father's lips, feeling the stubble of beard against his fingers, an intimacy strange and wonderful.

"That water tastes good, Jim."

"Drink it all."

"A mite more—cold inside."

"You'll be all right, Pa."

"Don't go worryin', Jim."

"I ain' worryin', Pa."

"A little more water—"

The cup was empty. Jim looked down at his father's face, at the hard lines, at the open eyes that saw nothing. He touched his father's face, the curling hairs of his beard, the dry lips.

"Jim."

He raised his eyes and saw men standing over him, wondered vaguely how long they had been there, felt resentment at their presence—almost as if they were intruding.

"Jim, better come along."

He shook his head. More than anything, he felt that he must stay there beside his father.

"Come along, Jim."

"I'll stay here. You get Maw."

Their eyes held his. He rose slowly, shaking his head, and old Captain Brady took his arm and guided him along.

His mother lay outside the shelter pit, and a blanket covered her. They drew back the blanket, so he could see her face. Her face was peaceful, not like his father's, but with closed eyes, with some of the lines erased from the skin. The lips were not hard, and he tried to remember if they had ever been hard. He wanted to touch the lips, just to lay the tips of his fingers against them. They were cold; the rush of fear was like ice over his body. He wasn't afraid because she was dead; he was afraid because he understood for the first time how it was with them, with the brood, because he knew instinctively with what passion they were conceived, with what suffering.

"She come outta the pit after me," Jim muttered.

"There ain' no use cryin', Jim," Captain Brady told him.

Vaguely conscious that they were there—his sister Jenny, his brother Ben, Cal, Lizzie—all the brood, all the bits of flesh from the same tree, jealous, squabbling, he said, "I ain' cryin'," his voice hoarse and too old for him. He pointed to his brothers and sisters. "Get outta here."

Evening almost by now, and long shadows from the wagons, and a wind out of the sunburnt stretches of the plains.

He saw the brood staring at him, wondering. Then he saw them stumbling away, Jenny crying, Ben frightened, Cal glancing back at his mother's still face.

"No use stayin' here, Jim," Captain Brady said gently. "You gotta take things like a man, Jim. That's how it is. All this—well, maybe none of us reckoned on all this. We set out to make new homes somewhere, and that's about

all we thought of. I guess none of us reckoned on this. But it come, an' that's all. When somethin' comes, you take it, else it crumples you up."

"She come outta the pit after me," Jim mumbled. "She knowed I was out here, so she come after me. Seven quart a water I spilled this morn. And still she got me a cup a water somehow." He took a deep breath, remembering his father. "I went to take him a cup a water. I got to thinkin' there wasn't one thing all my life I done for him that way, like takin' him a cup a water to drink out of. All my life long, not one thing. And then I took the water to bring along to him, an' right there I couldn't give it to him. Maybe I was afraid he'd lick me for comin' outta the pit—"

"Mind me now, Jim," Captain Brady said. "They're sleepin' peaceful-like, an' can't harm or trouble come to them any more. But we got to move on. We're low on water an' low on food. Maybe they'll attack again an' maybe they won't, but we got to move on. They had enough to last them now till morn, I reckon. It's forty mile to Fort Smith, an' we reckon to travel all night. Maybe we'll hit it by dawn, maybe not; but we'll push on. You got to think about that. We're set to split you up, you an' your brothers an' sisters, maybe one or two to a wagon—"

"We got a wagon," Jim said.

"All right, Jim. But it's a long way West."

"Not so long now."

"If you're gonna act pigheaded, Jim—"

"Maybe I am. You ain't splittin' us up, Captain. We gotta wagon, an' got horses. We'll get along."

"What about the baby?"

"I guess Jenny'll mind the baby."

"Jim, you poor little damn fool, you're just a kid. You—"

"Maybe so. She come outta the pit to get me, an' she was shot. But she come outta the pit to get me."

"You poor little damn fool."

"You ain' splittin' us up."

"You poor little damn fool. Go harness up your horses."

It was dark when the eighteen wagons moved away from the shelter pit. Jim was sixth in line, holding reins to four horses. He was tall, sun-splotched, ugly, and awkward even in the dark. He sat there conscious of the brood in the wagon behind him, five bits of frightened, jealous life.

As he stirred the horses, he tried to separate himself from grief, from fear, from all fear of the future, from everything but the brood that was his and part of him. He pursed his lips and whistled: "Oh! Susanna, oh don't you cry for me—"

7

The Day of Victory





THE DAY OF VICTORY

WHEN he awoke on the cool brisk morning of the twenty-fifth of November, in that gray time between the dawn and the sunrise, it was with the partly conscious realization that today was different from other days.

Today was a part of November in the year 1783, yet today was marked indelibly. At first he didn't know how that should be, or why, sensing only vaguely that he was here in his headquarters on Manhattan Island, half asleep, half awake, trying to find himself. He was tired, as he had been so often of late; a man grows tired as the years bind him and add up. He would have liked to lie in bed for a few hours more but he knew that to be quite impossible.

He had been dreaming and had awakened from the dream, and he knew it was quite wrong—what so many people said, that you couldn't dream the same thing twice; he knew you could, not twice but a hundred times, and the dream was always the same.

In the dream he came home. In the morning he came home, riding up through the fields while they were still

wet with dew. He would go through a field of rye so that the dew would put a polish on his boot tops, and the horse would stamp and dance, the way they do in a field of wet grass. The smells would be sweet, the magnolia blossoms like a thousand lanterns; and he rode right up to the house.

He rode up and old Jackson took his horse. He kissed Martha and it was as if he hadn't been away at all, except perhaps down the road to see a neighbor about selling a newly weaned colt. That was the way in the dream.

Jackson said, "Good morning, sir, Mr. Washington," and Martha scolded about his boots. The dogs frolicked about him eagerly and Jackson was smiling broadly as he said over and over, "Mighty good to see you, sir, Mr. Washington, mighty good to see you."

And, awake now, he knew that it was eight years—no, more than that, and he knew how this day was different.

Dressing, he thought of all the times through the years that he had anticipated this day. Some things stood out more than others; he remembered the time in '76—or was it '77—when he met a mother who had lost her son, and wanting to say something—anything—yet able to think of nothing, blundering as a man does, blurted out, "What he died for—I think it will be worth the price."

"What did he die for?"

Trying to explain, he found himself incoherent and she said, "Will this ever be over? Or will it go on and on? And how many more must die?"

And now it was over. He remembered a man who had lost everything, house and family, a man in the ranks who said, "The devil is that you can't think of an end—there is no end. It goes on and a man forgets about peace."

And now it was the end.

He remembered the defeats, the endless hammering defeats, when they all screamed, "Give up! Give up!" When they pleaded, "Peace at any price." When they begged him, "Make us terms." Freedom was a dream. He remembered '76, '77, '78, '79, running away always, hacked, bleeding, leaving brown clots in the summer dust, scarlet splashes in the winter snow, the beggars' army, the winter encampments where they lay and starved and died, the logic with which wise men reasoned that they couldn't win, temperate men that they couldn't exist, judicious men that they couldn't even retreat.

He remembered the plots, the pettiness, the traitors, the defeatists, the weak and the brave, the shoddy and the glorious.

He remembered the women and then it was better. He was a man who had loved women, many women. There was a time when he could dance twelve hours, with a woman on either arm and a quart of wine under his belt. He remembered the women who had carried the wounded into their houses, the women who had fed the beggars, the women who had taken his hand and said they trusted him.

Thinking of the women made him look in his mirror, stare at the long bony face, the tight mouth, the pale gray eyes and the thin red hair. An old man and yet when it started he had been young.

When Washington came out of his room General Knox was waiting for him. Knox was a fine combination of sedateness and excitement, hugely fat, his pudgy hands folded across his stomach, his eyes deep in wrinkles of flesh.

The commander-in-chief said, "Today it is, Harry."

And Knox nodded his big head as casually as he could. That was the way it was.

"A good day," Knox remarked. "I think we'll have sunshine."

"That would be nice."

"Cool, but not cold."

And why not speak of the weather, he thought, the weather being one of the few things always present. He looked at Knox with new interest, the way you look at men condemned, the way you look at anyone before parting—Knox the faithful, the loyal, the one man beyond suspicion, the one other man who had never lost faith. Knox was fat and paunchy and haggard, the way a fat man can be haggard, and he looked old. Things made men old. Knox was only thirty-three now; when it began, he had been a boy of twenty-five.

"Think of Knox as a boy," he said to himself.

It was quite impossible. How did one take up where one left off? Then Knox had been a bookseller, a chubby talkative boy with a wife and children, but that was eight years ago and more. And Knox spoke about the weather—and it was natural, he thought, quite natural.

And Knox, in turn, staring at the very tall, well-dressed thin man who had come from the bedroom, a Virginia farmer once—but that too forgotten—found more words impossible.

"We will go down to the city slowly," the tall man said and added, "the first time in all these years, Harry. How do you suppose it will look?"

Knox shrugged and somehow managed to say, "And then?"

"And then I'll go home," the Virginia farmer smiled.

Going home was something that had never been out of his mind, never for a day, hardly ever for an hour. Eight years had not turned him into a military man and now he realized that he had never really been a soldier, but rather a private citizen whose life had been temporarily disturbed, who had found that he could not live with certain things as they were and had set out to change them. He had put on a uniform and he was going away for a little while.

His wife had known better; holding both his hands then, she stared at him as if she had seen him for the last time, tall, pock-marked, skinny, a man she knew so well, all his little foibles and faults, and knowing that when he went all the props would go from under her life.

"We'll manage," she said and agreed smilingly that it would just be a short time.

He knew she was lying; they both knew, and stared at each other.

"Well, it has to be done," he had said. "You can't live with a thing hanging over your head."

"You can't," she agreed.

They were reluctant to discuss basic causes and the words *freedom* and *liberty* never were spoken. She reminded him about his woolen underwear.

"I know you don't like to wear it," she complained fretfully.

"But I will."

"And change out of damp clothes."

He nodded, reminding her which fields he planned to plow and seed for the coming year. "I mean, if I am not back," he explained.

"Don't drink too much."

He said he wouldn't and she knew he would. "It will be only a little while," he said, "and then I'll be back."

They were camped in Harlem now and New York City was ten miles to the south.

"That is why I thought we would start early," General McKay said, "and march slowly."

"Yes—" He was called back to reality by the expression on McKay's face.

"You won't be going home, sir?" McKay said softly.

"Yes, I'm going home."

They were alone in the drawing-room of the house he had made his headquarters. Speaking quickly, almost desperately, McKay said, "You know, sir, this is only the beginning—this must be only the beginning!"

He was a tall heavy-set man, dark-eyed, with deep hollows in his cheeks; brave enough in battle, the Virginian recalled, but fighting with a fury that had no other purpose than the easing of some burning resentment within him. For eight years McKay had lived for no real end; peace seemed to bewilder him. Now he clenched and unclenched his hands as he spoke: "What have we got, sir? What have we got, now that it's over?"

"A great deal, I think," the Virginian said slowly, watching General McKay through narrowing eyes.

"Do you? I think we have nothing, sir. For eight years we've fought and bled out our guts—and for what? For the rest of them to live on the fat of the land. I tell you, sir, there's something better than being a half-pay broken veteran, swilling in taverns—you see—"

The Virginian was watching him with a face as cold as

ice but he couldn't stop now; McKay had begun and he must go on.

"You could do it," McKay said. "We have the army, the power, and best of all, the victory. We've won the war and whatever is left now is ours by right. A single coup, a march on Philadelphia—Congress will run like rabbits and then it's ours—"

"Have you spoken to anyone else about this?" The tall man's voice was curiously controlled.

"Several, sir."

The Virginian reached out, took McKay's lapel in his big fist, drew the other close to him and said softly, "I ought to kill you—I am still your commander-in-chief, you know, and I ought to kill you. Who are the others?"

McKay shook his head and the Virginian flung him away so violently that he stumbled and fell.

"Get out! Get out!"

And he was going home, quietly, as he had planned. How his head ached! Was there no peace for him, no rest?

"I could stay," he told himself. "But for how long?"

If it couldn't go on without him it was no good. It had to go on without him, otherwise all their eight years of fighting were for nothing at all. It was better that he didn't know the men McKay had taken into his confidence. This was no longer war, that you could fight with guns and force. A nation, a republic, was no more than the men who made it.

Somehow in the next few days he would have to fight as he had never fought before, but without weapons and alone. He had to go home; all the eight years had been for this, that he should become a private citizen, lay down his arms and go home.

More immediate things pressed upon his attention: the occupation of the last city the enemy held. They were coming back to a New York they had lost a long time ago, so long that it was difficult to remember all the details.

He thought of the men who had been with him when the Continental Army lost New York, in '76. There was old Israel Putnam, dragged away from his farm and his fields. He would never forget old Israel's constant complaint of rheumatism. He was more loyal than most, braver than men half his age:

He thought of Mifflin, who was now President of the Continental Congress—Mifflin who stood by so calmly while Lee and Reed plotted against him, seven years past. And what would Mifflin say to this new nightmarish plot? What would old Tom Paine say, who had pleaded with the troops all the way on that lonely retreat from Hackensack to Trenton?

And what of Nathanael Greene, who had started the thing as a rosy-cheeked Quaker boy and was now a seasoned and veteran commander? Thinking of Greene, he remembered the handsome blade who could not keep his eyes from the ladies; Greene had danced and flirted into this war, but it had done something to him, changed him as it had changed so many others. But through all of it Greene had stood fast—along with Harry Knox, who was chief of artillery.

Knox lasted; nothing had changed him, nothing could. And then the tall man, thinking of what McKay had said, wondered whether Knox had been one of those spoken to about a frightened Congress fleeing from Philadelphia, a military dictatorship—and if so, why had Knox said nothing to him?

The Virginian tensed, telling himself that this thing must be fought calmly and expertly. If he lost his own head, what then?

Knox entered the room, saluted, laid an affectionate hand on the other's arm and said, "Sir, you will lead the troops, won't you?"

"You lead them, Harry."

"If you wish, sir. It's a great honor."

"Of course it's an honor, Harry"—and then Knox looked at him, not quite certain whether he was being gently laughed at or not. The tall, thin man paced along the drawn-up ranks, struck with the thought, once he was outside, that he was reviewing them for the last time, holding on to that thought, yet unable completely to realize it this November morning of 1783.

These were his men, these tattered weary ill-dressed veterans. He sought for the strength in them and found it—not plots and not a march on the Congress, but a strength that comes out of years of fighting shoulder to shoulder.

There was Miles Crock, with him eight full years; George Ross who had enlisted at fifteen; Jacob Fusterbee, close on seventy, tough as leather; Adam Wheelright, Fuller Jackson, Moses Dane, Jeremiah Danbury, Isaac Watson, Isaac Crane, so many Isaacs, so many Jacobs and Jeremiahs. He said to one, "Going home?"

"Yes, sir—home."

And asked him for the first time, "Are you married?"

"Yes, married."

"And all this, eight years, what have you got out of it?"

"I reckon we've won, sir. Things go on. We're a stiff-necked breed and we went in because we like our own ways. I figure the time ain't wasted—"

For all of them it was much the same—at least, he hoped so, pleaded so to himself, looking into their faces. Once he could not have named ten of these men and now he knew a thousand names. Once he had curled inwardly at the sight of their dirty shirts, patched breeches and rusty muskets; but since then something had happened to him as well as to them. Leaving them he felt lonely and desolate; he sought for the one thing he wanted to take with him, a knowledge of their strength.

As he walked on, the men's faces turned after him. Eight years had made them soldiers, tough, lasting, well trained—the best soldiers in the world, he often thought, in spite of the fact that they wore no uniforms, that their feet were wrapped in rags and sacking. The world's first citizen army, they had done their job, and unlike the professional fighters of other nations, they would become householders once more. But did they realize that?

Stopping in front of one of them, a face that had been at Brooklyn, White Plains, Trenton, Brandywine, Valley Forge, Yorktown, he offered his hand.

The other took it shyly.

He would have liked to say something that mattered, like "Good-by, old comrade—believe in what we've fought for, believe!" but he could say nothing and the man who took his hand began to weep, the tears rolling unashamed down his face.

Good soldiers though they were, that was more than they could stand. They roared and clustered around him, hundreds and hundreds of them, reaching for his hands, his arms, just to touch a bit of his clothes, roaring at the top of their lungs.

And in that moment a wave of awful fear passed through him; he saw how what McKay had suggested was possible, if he were just to say the word.

He said nothing, just stood motionless.

General Henry Knox led the troops, walking his horse in silence and watching the tall Virginian who rode with the dignitaries, Governor Clinton, Pierre Van Cortlandt and others. And once the Virginian caught his eye and could have sworn that Knox's glance said, "What will you do? How will you manage it? Or will all the years we fought be for nothing?"

Someone was saying to the tall man in buff and blue, "Really, sir, it's a shame they can't make a better show."

"Better show?" His thoughts were miles away.

"I mean, sir, even in triumph it would be better if they had uniforms instead of rags, I mean if only to produce—"

"They are citizen soldiers," the tall man said coldly. "That's hard to understand, isn't it?"

The other mumbled something and the Virginian's mood changed. Watching the marching men, he said, "I think they understand—look at the way they march."

"Sir?"

He was trying to think it out. The war had been won; the men would go home and try to put things together where they had left off. Some would succeed and some would fail; that was the price and he realized it was a larger price than had been paid for the victory. Did the men know? Were they strong enough?

People forget, he told himself. Here was a new country and a new world and everyone would be too busy living to

remember the few thousand poor devils who gave it to them. Things were that way and gratitude was a short-lived virtue.

Someone was saying to him, "But the enemy will see them, and that won't make the best impression, will it?"

"Why, I don't know," the Virginia farmer said, more lightly than he felt. "Why, I really don't know."

As the troops approached New York City the weather turned colder and the men licked up their pace. They marched smartly and with precision, and the thud, thud, thud of their feet echoed over the fields and woods.

A brisk November wind, blowing from over the Palisades, sent dead leaves swirling among the ranks, and occasionally, when they came to an open space on a bluff, they could see the little whitecaps dancing on the Hudson. A single small boat scudded along, its white sail dipping again and again as in salute.

Someone picked up a song. They sang *The Green Hills of Pennsylvania*, *The Pretty Lady of My Heart*, *The World Turned Upside Down* and last of all, their own mocking doggerel, *Yankee Doodle*. In fine spirits they roared it out, swaggering as they marched along, tilting their long muskets from side to side.

And everywhere along the line of march people had gathered to applaud and gape, boys swaying on fences, clusters of townsfolk who had walked up to welcome them, cheering the way cheers are given for the victors.

The Virginia farmer no longer listened to the chattering of the great men who rode with him. He was living over the time eight years ago when his army fled like rabbits from these same fields and woods of lower Manhattan.

Frightened and defeated and beyond hope: that was what everyone had said. They said that it was all over then, eight years ago, when it had scarcely begun. The faint of heart came out of their holes and pleaded with him to understand that it was all over. And he had been too stolid, too stubborn, too insensate.

He had gone on with the lost fight against impossible odds. Now it was all very far away; eight years dims everything, including suffering; and as he rode along he tried to reach back and understand why the cause had never been lost.

He remembered a letter he had written to his wife, in which he had said. "For me, there is no way back until this is over. You know how I love my home, yet if this last for twenty years, I must stay by it until it is over."

Governor Clinton was saying, "We hear rumors—that the men are dissatisfied, even that they would mutiny and march on Philadelphia."

"And that they would set me up as a dictator? You need not be afraid to say it."

"I've heard that. I trust you, sir—believe me, everyone trusts you—if you could stay?"

"It would accomplish nothing. Who am I? I fought a war with them. I am going home. They would go home too."

"But will they?"

"We aren't soldiers, we are men who took up guns for a little while, do you understand? And now we will put our guns away. We are not a people who live by guns." He could quiet Clinton, but in himself there was an aching doubt.

They were in the city now. Two redcoat files had been drawn up and the Continentals were to march between. The redcoats, disarmed, stood at attention, so stiff and

straight and precise that they reminded the Virginian of wooden dolls. Anxiously he looked at his own men; they were not precise; they walked with a swagger, slouched, rolled their shoulders.

There was a difference.

The drums played and the Americans marched between, and now, somehow, no one cheered, no one spoke—because this was so finally, so completely the end.

He had planned, some time before, to slip away quietly; but now he was relieved when word came to him that they would all be gathered in Fraunces' Tavern, where they would expect him to say something before he went.

He made it clear and they knew that he was going away, that he would become a private citizen, just a man, just a farmer. They wanted him for a little while more as he had been for eight years and he in turn knew that in Fraunces' Tavern he would find the answer to the question that perplexed him.

He wore his buff and blue uniform, the uniform he had always worn and which his fellow officers had copied as a symbol of their esteem. He would continue to wear it until he arrived home and then Martha would put it away. She would reseam it and lay it, full of camphor, in a cedar box.

Now at the end, when it seemed that the going home he had planned for so long might be put off indefinitely, the details of the life he had left eight years ago became clearer than ever. Long, long past, it had been something that he accepted, the broad fields, the houses, the trees and fences, the horses and dogs, all his, the property of a very rich man. Martha was a wife who could annoy a man, she had a long tongue, she could scold with the best, as when he lost at cards, as he so often did.

"Of course you lost."

"I sometimes win," he would protest.

"Do you? Either way, it seems a childish fashion of finding pleasure."

Having no children of his own, sometimes a realization of loneliness would strike him in the face like a wet cloth and then the emptiness would grow and grow. Then, in those days when everything had been his by right, he had no defense against the dark moods; when they seized him it would seem as if there was little enough reason for him to live.

And suddenly it was gone, his security, his wealth, his broad acres, not taken from him, but at the same time not his by right. Nothing was his by right, not the house, not the life he lived, nothing.

All of it had to be won, to be paid for; the simple right to exist had to be won and wealth was nothing. The right to walk as a free man on his own soil had to be paid for in blood and suffering. Even eight years was not too high a price; when there is only one way, the price is not measured.

Now he looked forward to seeing them in Fraunces' Tavern. How could it be any different for those who had served alongside him?

He recalled the time Martha had come to the terrible winter encampment at Valley Forge, to live there with him for a while, and the way she had said, "Has it always been as bad as this?"—softly, almost fearfully.

"Sometimes better, sometimes worse."

He wasn't wearing his woolsey and suddenly she began to scold but this time there was a difference in her scolding; she too had realized that the good things have their price.

Holding her in his arms then, he saw clearly how all his values had changed.

"Will there ever be peace again?" she asked him.

"I think so."

He felt that there would be peace and war and peace for many, many years. Men would have things and those things would be theirs by right and then suddenly it would all be nothing unless it was paid for.

In Fraunces' Tavern, which still stands on Broad Street, they were waiting for him. They had been speaking about many things, the little knot of officers who commanded the army of the United States of America, recalling this and that. Knox had just finished telling how in '76, when they had lost the city, he had tried to make a stand on a little hill just to the north. And apologetically, "You know, I was just a boy, twenty-six then. I thought it was all over—how many times did we think that? He never thought so. Now it seems incredible that he's going away. To go back—well, he was able to do the rest. I suppose it's right to go back."

"If you have something to go back for—"

Copley, a colonel of cavalry, said, "If he goes back, I go back; and if he says, 'Follow me to hell,' I follow him there."

"You could see him saying that? I tell you, he goes home. Haven't I lived and eaten and frozen and starved with him for eight years—and do you think for nothing, for some cheap revolt after all those who have died to make a place where people can live? Then I tell you, you don't know him."

"We know him—"

Knox said huskily, "There is only one way—" feeling a terrible aching fear that perhaps he had been cheated, that

perhaps all this had been for nothing, and then added, "It's the only way; you trust him; it has to be that way."

"There might be another way," Alexander Hamilton said thoughtfully. "We'll know when we see him."

They looked at Hamilton, who had loved the Virginian, hated him, been willing to die for him, turned against him and then for him; they knew Hamilton's ambition.

"It's in what he says and does, isn't it?" someone said softly as if in that phrase summing the whole matter up.

"Yes, in what he does."

Then the Virginian came in and there was a sudden hush. Watching them he stood at the door and then he smiled, and still no one said anything.

"I've known you when you were more talkative," he said.

"Sir?"

"Sit down," he nodded. "Haven't we been on our own feet long enough, gentlemen? We've earned the right to be comfortable, to sit in chairs and stretch our feet at the fire."

"You're leaving today?" Hamilton asked. Everything hung on his words and they watched him anxiously.

He refused to think of plots and schemes and said quietly, "I'm going to resign my commission and go home. It's a right I have earned, I think. I am a farmer, gentlemen, not a soldier. The war is over but I'm afraid the peace is just beginning. It will be a good feeling to take off our uniforms after all this time, won't it, gentlemen?"

They stared at him.

The only sign he gave was when he poured a glass of wine. Then his hand trembled slightly and a few drops spilled over the edge.

"To our good health—and to a long, long peace!"

They drank with him. Then he bit his lip and turned

away for a moment. On almost every face there was an expression of realization combined with relief.

McKay said, "Sir, will you take my hand?"—stared at Washington and added, pleading, "What is one to know, sir? I'm human; if I wanted too much, I'm empty of that now—"

He remembered McKay in battle; it didn't matter whether he liked McKay or hated him; it mattered what the others thought and now all of them were watching. The war was over; men go home because they believe in what they fought for.

He took McKay's hand and when McKay murmured something about being forgiven, the tall Virginian pretended not to hear. He drank another toast and said, "I wish you all that's good, health and happiness. Go home and live quietly but remember that things come high. We've paid the price, we know."

They poured another toast all around and drank to one another. Knox shattered his glass in the hearth.

The tall man said, "Come to me, each of you."

Knox came first; they grasped hands, the tears running down their faces.

To Whitehall Ferry they all walked together, with their own ragged troops lining each side of the street. The sky was overcast and there was promise of an early snowfall. The troops held their cloaks tight about them and the drums took up a marching beat. The Virginian kept looking at his men; he was no longer afraid; somehow the issue had been decided; a democracy had been made and for many years it would go on. And so nebulous was the whole thing that he was not quite sure now how he managed to turn it so.

"Perhaps I was a fool to be afraid," he thought. Now he could think of nothing but that he was going home.

At the ferry a barge was waiting to take him over to the Jersey shore. The boatmen had already cast off and now held the craft to the docks with their hooks. The boatmen were cold and impatient.

Turning at the last to his friends, the Virginian found nothing he could say; the surge of happiness and gratitude inside him could not be put into words. Awkwardly he stepped into the barge.

"Ready, General Washington?" the mate of the crew demanded.

He nodded. The boatman pushed off; the oars bit at the water.

At the dock, men and officers stood in a close silent group. Their eyes were on their commander and now as never before they knew him and understood him. They were bereft, yet at the same time strangely happy. Almost to a man there were tears on their cheeks, yet looking at each other they were not ashamed. Knox bit his heavy lips, shook his head like a shaggy bear. Hamilton was like a boy, crying without effort to halt the flow of tears, and McKay was looking at something he had never seen before, smiling curiously. Copley clenched and unclenched his hand, and Mercer stood mute, head bowed.

Just before the boat rounded the point of the Battery, the tall man took off his three-cornered hat and dipped it in salute.

They returned the salute and then the boat was gone.

Amos Todd's Vinegar





AMOS TODD'S VINEGAR

PA WAS a stubborn man. Often and again, Ma said to him: "Amos Todd, you're a hard and unforgiving man." But Pa said the Todds had vinegar in their blood, and that was the case as long as he could remember.

"Well any child of mine that has Todd vinegar," Ma said, "I'll just tar the stuffings out of, and that's all."

But she couldn't do much with Pa. I guess there wasn't a more stubborn man in all the state of Kansas. 'Way back in the nineties, when they were first married and Pa was breaking out his first quarter section, four drunken Indians came along and burnt his barn.

Another man might have been content to call the sheriff, swear out a warrant, and then go back to building a new barn. Seeing that the Indian wars had been over and done with so many years, that would have been the sensible thing to do. But not Pa. Pa took his gun, saddled a horse, and went after those four Indians. He chased them into Oklahoma and then into the panhandle. He chased them all the way across New Mexico into Arizona. He caught up with two of

them in the desert, hog-tied them, and went after the other two. One of them died of thirst, but Pa brought the other three all the way back to Kansas to stand trial.

He was gone three months, but he had his satisfaction. His farm went to seed that year, and Ma didn't know whether he was alive or dead, but he had proved to folks that Amos Todd was a mighty hard and stubborn man.

Well, all this that I'm going to tell about now started because Lucy went to visit her Aunt Effie up in Nebraska. Aunt Effie was Pa's sister, but Pa hadn't spoken to her in twenty years. That was because Aunt Effie had married a Nebraska hardware dealer, and Pa had been against the match.

Ma wrote to Aunt Effie regularly, and every Christmas Aunt Effie sent presents for each of us, even for Pa, although he never opened his presents and the lot of them were stacked up for twenty Christmases back.

Another man would have forgotten and forgiven by and by, but Pa was too proud of the Todd vinegar. The only thing that happened during the twenty years was that Pa got such a feeling against Nebraska men that he wouldn't even buy a tube of toothpaste if it was made by a Nebraska firm.

Lucy had turned nineteen and was pretty as a picture, when Aunt Effie wrote and said that nothing would please her better than to have Lucy come up to Nebraska and visit for a while. She said that here was her only niece, and she had never seen the body of her, but only pictures. And Lucy—well she had never been further than Topeka, and the thought of going up to Omaha, living there for a month, and perhaps making a trip to Chicago, was enough to keep

her awake nights. She spent hours in her room, putting up her hair, the way she had seen in pictures, and trying every dress she owned and most of Ma's.

"She ain't going," Pa said. "I won't have Effie influencing my daughter."

Ma just tightened her lips. She was an Amslee, and if the Todds had vinegar in their blood, the Amslees had pepper in theirs.

"She's going a week come Monday," Ma said. "You can browbeat me, Amos Todd, and you can browbeat your hired help, but Lucy's going to live gracious if no one else in this family does."

"Effie's ideas—" Pop began.

"You leave Effie out of this! You ain't spoken to Effie in twenty years, and you don't know any more about her than the man in the moon does."

"Who's going to help with the kitchen chores?" Pa demanded, taking a new tack.

"I'll do them myself," Ma said grimly. And nodding at me, "Jackie will help me, if I need help. Effie's your own sister, bone and blood, and Lucy's got a born right to go and visit with her."

Pa went off muttering about Nebraska men, and Ma and Lucy set to packing for the visit. Lucy couldn't kiss Ma enough, and if I had let her, she would have kissed me too. Her cheeks were pink and pretty, and her blue eyes were shining like stars.

Pa went on working the farm, only now half again as hard as he had worked before Lucy left. Mealtimes, he would sit and mutter under his breath about Effie and Nebraska. Lord, but that man hated Nebraska. To hear him

talk, the white man's world ended at the north Kansas border.

One day, a drummer drove into the yard with an automatic potato peeler. You set it up, poured in water, poured in the potatoes, turned a crank, and before you knew it, your potatoes were peeled. Ma liked the idea, because as she put it she couldn't serve a meal, breakfast, dinner or supper without potatoes as a side dish. She had the drummer set up the machine in the kitchen, and when Pa and the men came in for dinner, there she was sitting, calm as pie, turning a handle and peeling the supper potatoes in half a minute.

"Now, Pa," she said, "I do like this contraption. It's a pleasure to know that five minutes a day will peel all the potatoes you men can eat."

"If Lucy wasn't off, learning fancy ways from Effie, then you wouldn't have no worry about peeling a few potatoes," Pa said.

"Never mind Lucy. I peeled potatoes twenty-seven years, and I think it's high time I made the work easier. And if a boughten machine can save a body work, then I'm for the machine. Indeed, I dreamed enough about a machine that would peel potatoes."

"Seems you're for anything to save a little work."

"And when you a bought a thresher," Ma came back, "and the children didn't get clothes or me a dress for two years—"

Well, they went on like that for about fifteen minutes until Ma had pretty well worn him down. He was almost ready to buy, when suddenly he cocked an eye at the drummer and said:

"Who puts this out?"

"Adams and Cornwall," the drummer said comfortably.

"And where are they at?"

"Lincoln, Nebraska."

Pa's mustache bristled up and his eyes narrowed. "Get out!" he told the drummer. "You take that confounded contraption and get out!"

The drummer blinked foolishly, and Ma said: "For land sakes, Pa, you can't hold a thing like that against a potato peeler."

"I can and I do."

"But Adams and Cornwall have a reputation for fine kitchen products," the drummer pleaded.

"Take it out," Ma said resignedly. She knew better than to argue with Pa when he was set on anything. "I peeled potatoes for twenty-seven years, and I can go on peeling them. Take it out."

Pa sat down to eat without saying a word.

After the incident of the potato peeler, one thing after another seemed to go wrong. Moss Jackson, the hired man who had been with Pa for eleven years, quit. "I can take cussedness," he told Ma, "but just so much cussedness."

"It's just as well," Pa said. "This farm won't make bread and butter for us, let alone hired men."

Then there were Lucy's letters. She wrote at least every other day, and her letters were such a satisfaction that Ma couldn't keep from reading them aloud to Pa. She would wait until after supper when she had finished the dishes and Pa was smoking his pipe at the table, and then she would put on her spectacles and read the letters aloud. Only whenever she came to some direct reference to Aunt Effie, she had to tone down and sometimes leave whole sentences out. Otherwise, Pa would get up from the table and stalk away.

Now it seems that Lucy was having a marvelous time in Omaha. Aunt Effie took to her right from the start, and Uncle Ely said there wasn't a sweeter girl on earth, even if she was Amos Todd's daughter. They spread this news around town, and soon Lucy was having more dates than she knew what to do with. This boy took her dancing and that boy took her to the movies, and this girl gave a party for her.

"Frivolous foolishness," Pa said. "Next thing, she'll up and marry one of them soda fountain boys."

So Ma took to easing off here and there in the letters, and presently, she wasn't reading but one or two letters a week. And even in those letters, she couldn't keep down Lucy's preference for one of the boys. His name was Tom Patterson, and right from the start, Pa was against him. That was because Tom had just finished agricultural college. Pa had never held with college for farmers.

Pa held back for a long time, but at last he burst out: "Effie or no Effie, I don't want a daughter of mine taking up with a no-account Nebraskan college farmer. You write Lucy it's time she came home."

"I will," Ma said quietly.

But a week went by with no letters from Lucy, at least none that Ma read at the supper table. Pa gnawed his mustache, and finally demanded why Lucy didn't write.

"She did write," Ma said gently.

"Well, is she coming home or not?"

"She'll be home this week," Ma said.

"I'd like to hear what new nonsense Effie drilled into her head," Pa said. "So read me that letter."

Ma fussed around, but couldn't find the letter. "It was nothing," she told Pa. "Just neighbor talk—nothing at all."

That was enough for me. I fussed a little harder and found the letter in Ma's sewing box. And this is what Lucy had written:

"Mother dear, I told you in my last letter how it had come about. You said I should do what I think is right, and I think it's right to marry a man you love. I would want you and Dad at my wedding, and that's what makes me so unhappy—in the middle of my happiness. I remembered what you always said about Amos Todd being the stubbornest man in Kansas. I couldn't give up Tom, so we were married here, at Aunt Effie's home, a very quiet wedding. I know you'll forgive me, and I know that when Dad sees Tom and sees how wise he is when it comes to a farm, he will love him as much as I do. So prepare him just a little, and we will be home Thursday."

You can imagine the way it was in our house between then and Thursday. I knew and Ma knew, though she didn't know I knew. I watched Ma and I watched Pa. I said to myself, "She ain't forgot that peeling machine, and she'll stand up to him."

But Tuesday came and Wednesday came, and then Thursday morning came, and Ma hadn't said a word to Pa. And then at breakfast she said, sort of simple like:

"Lucy's coming home today, Pa."

"Well, it's just about time."

"It is," Ma agreed. "You know, Pa," she went on curiously, "our Lucy's not the same any more. She's all grown up, and one of these days she's going to look around and say, 'There's the man my heart's set on to marry and raise children with.'"

"I suppose so," Pa agreed.

"It would be nice."

"Depends on the man," Pa said.

"Yes, it does. But our Lucy wouldn't have anything but a nice boy. And suppose she met some real nice boy over there at Effie's. Why she might just take it into her head to marry him."

"What!"

"Well, just supposing—"

"Suppose nothing!" Pa roared. "I seen Effie throw herself away on that no-account Nebraska hardware dealer twenty years ago. Any daughter of mine that takes—"

"No need to yell," Ma said.

Pa looked at her keenly. "What's all this aiming at?" he demanded.

"Nothing—nothing at all."

"All right. Lucy will be home today."

"Yes," Ma agreed. "She'll be home today."

That was all for the time being. Pa finished his breakfast and went out, and Ma shook her head and turned to the dishes. But she was troubled; she kept looking toward the road, and she kept shaking her head.

After she had finished the dishes, she sat down and clasped her hands tightly in her lap, like she always did when she was troubled. She looked at me and said:

"Childhood's a blessing. There's nothing but trouble and more trouble when folks grow up."

I could see that and agreed with it.

"I'd better set to baking," Ma nodded, glancing at the old blue wall clock. "Trouble comes soon enough even if you don't count the minutes."

Pa came in from the fields early, went upstairs, washed and shaved, and put on his white shirt with the blue stripes. Ma had baked two big apple pies, the kind that look like mountains from being stuffed high with filling, and two butter yeast cakes that set the whole house full of perfume. She had baked a whole ham with cloves and brown sugar and apple slices.

Pa went around sniffing the apple pies and breaking bits from the crust of the ham. "Lord, but I love baked smoked ham," he smiled.

Ma just nodded.

"Now what's bothering you, Ma?" he wanted to know. "Here's Lucy coming home and the house full of good things to eat, and you got a face as long as a mile."

"Nothing—"

"Maybe you'd like for her to stay on up there at Effie's. Maybe it don't seem right to you that a man should have his family around him?"

"Maybe," Ma said. Then she began to set the table, fumbling with the dishes like she had never set a table before in her life. Pa had gone over to the window, and all of a sudden he stiffened and said:

"Ma!"

"Yes?"

"Here's Lucy."

"Yes?"

"Driving in with some young feller I never seen before. Never seen that old Ford either."

"Maybe someone drove her up from the station," Ma said lamely.

"Ain't but one hack at the station. That ain't Tod Elman."

Ma braced herself, tightened her lips, and walked over to Pa. "I got something to say to you," she told him, "and I got to say it fast. Before they come in here. Amos Todd, that man's your son-in-law, Lucy's husband."

Pa just stared at her.

"Now you heard me, Amos Todd. Don't stare so."

"Lucy's husband," Pa said.

"Now Amos Todd," Ma begged him, "just hold on to the ground. What's done is done, and there ain't the man living who can saw sawdust. Lucy's married, and that's all that's to it. Nice boy too, setting up to be a farmer. Went to college and got himself a diploma, which is more than any Todd ever done."

"Went to college," Pa nodded. He walked around the kitchen, sat himself in a chair, and rubbed his mustache. His eyes had what Ma called the Todd vinegar look, and I wouldn't have changed places with Lucy's Tom for anything in the world.

Right then, the door opened and Lucy came in, all flushed and smiling, looking prettier and happier than I had ever seen her look before. But underneath there was a good deal of doubt, and I saw that doubt when she looked at Pa, sitting there in a corner and rubbing his mustache.

And behind her, in the doorway, was her husband, Tom Patterson. He was an awful nice-looking boy; he was tall, and he looked as if there was muscle under his coat. But Lucy must have told him about Pa.

Ma threw her arms around Lucy, and I sort of sidled over to be kissed, but Pa didn't move.

Then Lucy went over and kissed Pa on the forehead, but he still didn't move. "This is my husband, Tom Patterson," Lucy said.

Ma didn't hesitate; she smiled and took Tom's hand, and he kissed her. "I'm proud of any man my Lucy picked," Ma said.

"I'm not," Pa said.

"I don't know what you've got against me, sir," Tom said. "If it was wrong for Lucy and me to have gotten married up in Omaha, then I'm ready to beg your forgiveness."

"I got plenty against you," Pa said.

"Then won't you give me a chance to prove you're wrong?"

"I guess I know when I'm right and when I'm wrong," Pa snapped. "I guess I don't need any young Nebraska whippersnapper to come down here to tell me."

"I didn't mean that, sir."

"Please, Pa," Lucy said.

"And I don't want none of your sass," Pa said. "It's your Aunt Effie all over again."

"Now wait a minute, Amos Todd," Ma cried. "Twenty-seven years I been married to you, for better and for worse. I took your vinegar for twenty-seven years. I seen how you acted with Effie, and how you tried to wreck her life. But you ain't doing the same with Lucy. Lucy's married and she's going to be happy. You can take that or leave it."

Pa didn't say a word. He got up and went upstairs. Lucy began to cry, and Tom put his arms around her. Ma just shook her head and tried to soothe Lucy.

Then Pa came downstairs. He had a pillow in one arm and two blankets in the other.

"Where are you going?" Ma demanded.

"Out to the barn—to sleep. I'll be there until those two leave my house." And with that, he stalked out.

Lucy would have gone after him, but Ma held her back. "It's no use," Ma said. "The man don't live who can change Amos Todd's mind once it's made up."

"I'm afraid this is all my fault, Mrs. Todd," Tom said miserably.

"It ain't nobody's fault. And don't call me Mrs. Todd. Call me Ma."

"But what are we going to do?" Lucy wanted to know.

"We're going to eat supper. Now come along and eat before everything's cold."

After supper, Ma fixed a plate of ham and apple pie and milk, and had me take them out to Pa. I sat by and held the lantern while Pa ate.

"Nobody can make a ham taste like your Ma makes it taste," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Apple pie, too."

I nodded.

"Them two still there?"

"Lucy's helping Ma with the dishes."

"Well, see you're up early for the chores," he muttered.

Well, things went on like that for about a week, Pa sleeping in the barn, and Ma sending me out with fixings for him three times a day. Lucy and Tom would have gone, but Ma wouldn't have it. She said that until they had a home of their own, they would stay with her. She said that no Todd was going to drive her daughter out of her home.

Lucy had planned for Tom to come and work the farm with Pa. But now that was out of the question, and they had to look around for something else.

Finally, they hit on the Krandall place, a half section ad-

joining our east acreage. It had a reputation for being unlucky, and it had been in and out of the bank's hands half a dozen times in the past twenty years. As a matter of fact, a hill sloped up and over away from our property, and for some reason the drainage was all toward us. We could raise a high crop of corn when the corn on the Krandall place was like straggling weeds for want of water. Old man Krandall was just aching to sell when Tom and Lucy made him an offer.

Tom had been working before he went to college and summers while he was at college. Both his folks were dead, but they had left him about nine hundred dollars, which he had managed to keep intact. And Ma had two hundred and fifty dollars in the bank for Lucy. That was enough to buy the Krandall place, along with its mortgage, its rusty tools and its ramshackle, run-down house.

Ma knew that the Krandall place was a stone around the neck of anyone who tried to make it pay, but it was an awful temptation to have Lucy near her. She was afraid that if Lucy and Tom went far away, the same thing would happen that had happened between Pa and Aunt Effie. And Tom insisted that with what he had learnt about new methods of soil restoration and dust control and irrigation, he could make it pay.

So Ma gave in, and after a week, Tom and Lucy moved into the Krandall house. Ma had me running back and forth for three days, carrying things over for Lucy to use, but every time I set foot in that old shack Mr. Krandall had called a house, I got more and more worried.

Although he saw all the commotion, Pa never let on that he knew what was going on. But once, when I came to the barn with his supper, he put it straight to me.

"What's going on out there?"

"Lucy's fixing to move."

"Where?"

"Up to the old Krandall place. Tom bought it."

Pa whistled. "You don't say—" He was thoughtful over his food for a while, and then he began to chuckle. He chuckled until he could hardly eat. "The Krandall place," he said. "My land, he'll never take a good crop out of that if he sweats his skin right off his back. That Nebraska man sure got what was coming to him."

"It won't be so nice for Lucy either," I said. "You ought to see the old shack of a house she's going to live in."

"That ain't my doing!" Pa snapped. "I never told her to go up to Effie's in the first place. I knew no good would ever come out of that. It's your Ma's doing."

When I told Ma, she said: "He's stubborn and sinful as an old goat. I must have been either a saint or a fool for twenty-seven years."

Pa came back into the house on the same day that Tom and Lucy moved up to the Krandall place. The old shack wasn't really ready for them, but Ma said she couldn't stand to see Pa living out in the barn with the horses and the cows and the pigs, mean and stubborn as he was. She said that when you're married to a man as long as she was married to Pa, he gets to be a habit with you, even if it's a bad habit. She said to me:

"You go get your pa, and tell him to take a bath and change his clothes before he sits on any of my furniture."

And that night, Pa was back at his old place at the table, eating meat and potatoes with the air of a man who knows he is right. Ma said that maybe it was all for the best.

Even Pa had to admit that Tom wasn't afraid of work. He worked like a demon from before sunrise until after sunset. So did Lucy. Ma used to come back from visiting them clicking her tongue and shaking her head.

"Not human for a man to work like that," she said.

Tom was planning to show Pa how wrong he had been. For all that Ma and Lucy tore Pa down, calling him a stubborn goat, Tom took his part. He said that Pa was one of those men who had to be shown; and he was willing to bet anything that he could show Pa and bring him around to his way of thinking.

Ma took me over there with her one day. Tom had just finished putting a coat of fresh white paint onto the house. He had patched up the porch and the roof, and set new glass in the windows. Lucy had hung chintz curtains and re-covered most of the old furniture. The place was beginning to look like a home instead of an old shack.

"How do you like it?" Tom wanted to know. He was proud as a peacock.

"It's pretty," Ma admitted.

"I was hoping you'd bring Pa along with you," Lucy said.

Ma snorted.

"He'll change his mind soon," Tom grinned. "We're neighbors now."

"You don't know Pa."

"Well, soon as I take my first corn out, I'm going over to make a deal with him for two of his brood sows. Lucy says he has the finest brood sows in the country. Even if he doesn't like me, he can't refuse to sell."

"Can't he?" Ma said. And then she added worriedly: "You know, Tom, I have my misgivings about letting you take

this place. Nobody ever did take a pay crop out of this land."

"I will," Tom grinned.

For all Tom's work, he couldn't make anything of the Krandall place. Maybe if he had money, it would have been different. Irrigation costs money and so does soil restoration. Tom worked like a slave, but his corn was hardly worth the trouble of shucking.

And Pa just chuckled. He had known all along; he was getting a mighty lot of satisfaction out of the whole thing. Ma said to him:

"How you can be so ornery, Amos Todd, I don't know."

"It wasn't me that sent Lucy up to Effie's," Pa replied.

It was a dry year, and Tom wasn't the only farmer in the country who suffered. The drought hit Pa too, but Pa had something to fall back on. Tom didn't. Tom went into debt, and once when I went over there, I saw that Lucy could hardly hold the tears back.

Tom came around to talk about the brood sows with Pa. Pa listened quietly enough, stroking his mustache all the time. I had thought that maybe he wouldn't speak to Tom at all, but he was ready enough to listen and talk.

"Got cash?" he finally asked Tom.

"Well, I was hoping for some credit—"

"This is a bad year. A man sells for cash, or he don't sell."

"Good heavens," Tom said, "there's my farm, right over the hill yonder. It's not like I'm asking you to trust a stranger, even leaving out the fact that Lucy's your daughter."

"Seems you're a stranger to me," Pa said calmly.

"I see," Tom said shortly. Without another word, he turned and walked away.

I guess neither Lucy nor Tom told Ma about that, because Ma never mentioned the incident to Pa. Most of the time now she was very quiet, keeping her lips good and tight.

That was a hard winter for Tom and Lucy, but somehow they managed to pull through. And before spring. Lucy had a boy whom they called Amos. Pa didn't go to the christening.

"Pity it wasn't a girl, so they could call her Effie," Pa said.

One day, early that spring, two men in a long open car drove up the dirt road from the slab and pulled into our yard. "Mr. Todd around?" they asked me.

I ran for Pa, and when he came back the two men were standing near the car, studying our land. One of them was an elderly, gray-haired man in a blue suit. The other was younger and wore whipcord pants and laced-up boots.

"What can I do for you?" Pa asked them.

"My name's Allen," the older one said. "This is Mr. McCloud. We're interested in your land."

"Don't see what's different in my land from all the other land hereabouts."

"We think it is," Allen smiled. "Ever think of selling?"

"Nope."

"Suppose you got a good offer, a mighty fine offer?" McCloud asked.

"There ain't no offer that could make me sell," Pa said. "I been on this land nigh to thirty years. I aim to keep it."

"I see there's not much point arguing with you, Mr. Todd," the older man said.

"Pa never changed his mind yet," I put in.

"What are you so set on my land for?" Pa demanded.

"We'll come to that," Mr. Allen said. "Suppose we talk about a lease. Would you be willing to lease to us?"

"I'm no landlord," Pa said shortly. "Never was, never will be. Always worked the land myself and always mean to."

"Not in that sense," Mr. Allen said. "We don't want your land to farm it. We want what's underneath."

"Underneath?" Pa said. Then he grinned. "Oil, you mean. Well, you can get that idea right out of your head. There ain't oil under my land and there never was."

"Mr. McCloud here thinks there is. He's a geologist, and he's never guessed wrong yet. I'm willing to finance the borings, and all you have to do is to give us a lease. We pay for the option, so even if there's only sand and water down there, you don't lose anything. And if she runs oil, you stand to make a fortune on your percentage."

"There ain't oil down there and there never was," Pa said.

"But that's our risk, Mr. Todd. If we're willing to pay you well for the option and drill with our own resources, what do you stand to lose?"

"There ain't oil under my land," Pa insisted, "and I don't want any fool derricks going up over it. I don't want holes dug. I don't want my stock half scared to death with your foolishness. This is a farm, and I aim to run it as a farm. That's all."

They argued back and forth for fifteen minutes more, but Pa wouldn't budge an inch. He knew there wasn't oil under his land, and that finished the matter.

Finally, the older man shook his head wearily and started to climb into the car. But McCloud took his arm and led him over to one side. They spoke quickly, in low tones. Mc-

Cloud pointing to various parts of our land. Allen came back and asked Pa:

"Who owns that piece up the hill there and over beyond it?"

"Feller by the name of Tom Patterson," Pa grinned. "Maybe there's oil on his land too."

"Maybe there is," Allen said. Then they got in their car and drove off.

Pa went into the house and sat down in the kitchen, chuckling to himself.

"Who were those men?" Ma wanted to know.

"Two fools who figured I got oil under my property."

"Well, maybe you have—"

"I guess I been on the land long enough to know," Pa said.

The next day, Tom came over to our place and poked around the barns, rubbing his chin and studying the hogs. Pa walked over and said gruffly:

"'Morning."

"'Morning, Mr. Todd," Tom said.

"Guess you got business here?" Pa wanted to know.

"I guess I have," Tom nodded. "I've been looking over your hogs. They say you raise mighty fine hogs. I've been planning to buy a couple of fine brood sows for over a year now."

"I sell for cash," Pa snorted.

"Uh-huh," Tom nodded. He went into his pocket and fetched out a roll of bills as big around as his fist. "I picked my animals," he said. "Those two, right there. You name the price. I don't like to dicker."

Pa just stared at him.

"I'm in a hurry, Mr. Todd," Tom said. "My farm's a

mighty busy place. And if you see a good man to hire out, just send him around. I'm taking on help."

Well, Pa was so dumfounded he hardly remembered to boost the price on the hogs. Tom took the hogs, and Pa just stood there shaking his head.

Then Pa headed for the house to sound out Ma, as she generally knew what was going on over at Lucy's. He got into the kitchen, and then he hardly knew how to start.

"Something wrong?" Ma said.

"No—no."

Ma looked at him, and then she shook her head. "Lord, but you're too stubborn to even ask a question," she sighed. "Yes, Tom leased out to those oil men, and like as not they'll strike oil on his place."

"Leave his place full of holes and scrapwood," Pa said.

"Of course, you know too much to let them drill here."

"I know enough to keep fools off my land," Pa said.

It was about a week later that the man from the insurance company came over to the place. Hank Bluman had been writing Pa's insurance for more than twenty years, and now he hemmed and hawed before he was able to bring himself to the point of the matter. He was in the kitchen having some coffee and some of Ma's apple pie, and he kept praising the apple pie until Ma and Pa both knew something was wrong. At last he said:

"Now look here, Amos—I don't want to quibble, but I can't renew your policy the way things are now."

"Why not?" Pa demanded.

"Your chimney here in the kitchen isn't safe. The inspector reported that last year and the year before. Well, I pushed the renewal through each time, but now the com-

pany's cracking down. Either you fix the chimney or I can't write you insurance."

"That chimney's just as safe as the day I built it," Pa said. "I'm not spending good money to fix a chimney that's as safe as the day it was built."

Hank shrugged and began to put his papers together. He knew better than to argue with Pa.

"Wait a minute," Ma said. "It won't cost but a little to fix the chimney. Now you can't leave the house without insurance, Pa."

"I can," Pa said. "I carried insurance twenty years and the house never burnt down. I don't have to be told what's a good chimney and what's a bad one by a pack of dunder-heads."

"No use arguing," Ma told Hank. "You might as well go."

That was a bad summer. Added onto the summer before, it just about knocked the bottom out of everyone. It was hot as a furnace, with almost no rain; the dust came up, the cattle took sick, and the corn was weak and thin as weeds.

Up at Tom's place, they were drilling steadily and paying him good money for the lease. It cost a lot, but he managed to bring water to his crops, and he had a better yield than the year before. Also, he could afford to buy feed.

Young Amos was round and fat as a sausage, and Lucy was looking wonderful. They put a new roof onto the house and they widened the veranda. And then, toward the end of the summer, the well gushed.

Pa didn't say a word when Ma told him about the well coming in. It was already all over the neighborhood how he had refused to let them drill on his land. And Pa was hav-

ing it hard. Two bad years in a row had taken the edge off him. He needed money, but he knew what Ma would say if he even hinted about it. So instead of letting her know, he borrowed here and there, wherever he could. But when he went to the bank for money, they told him he could get all the money he needed by developing his land—in oil.

Ma never knew how bad things were getting, but she could see that they were steadily getting worse. I guess she would have been more worried, if it hadn't been that Lucy and Tom were doing so well. The money hadn't gone to their heads; Tom stuck to farming and bought himself another quarter section of land. They bought a car, and they were making plans for a new house.

One day, well onto the end of the summer, when Pa and I were out in the fields, we saw a trickle of smoke coming from the house. Ma had gone over to visit with Lucy and left her dinner cooking on the stove. Now we saw this smoke, blacker and wider than chimney smoke.

Pa raced for the house with me behind him, but by the time we got there the whole kitchen wall was in flames. Pa and I tried to pump water from the well, but it was like flicking drops into a bonfire. By the time Ma and Lucy and Tom and the volunteer fire company had reached the place, there wasn't anything to do but sit by and watch the flames burn down.

After a while, the volunteer firemen left. Pa sat on a wooden horse and stared at the blackened timbers. Ma wiped her eyes, and Tom and Lucy stayed well behind Pa, where he couldn't see them.

"Well, they do say," Ma said, trying to sound cheerful, "that every cloud has a silver lining. I was getting good and

tired of that house, Pa, and now we ain't got a choice but to build a new one."

"New one?" Pa questioned.

"Of course, the kind of a house I always dreamt of having."

"Where's the money coming from?" Pa wanted to know.

Ma smiled and said coaxingly: "Now all you have to do, Pa, is to sign up with those oil men and we'll have more money than we know what to do with."

"Oil! I'm running a farm, not an oil well. Before I make a fool of myself, I'll sleep on the ground."

Ma's lips tightened. "Amos Todd," she whispered, "do you mean to sit there and say you're not going to lease to those oil men?"

"Uh-huh," Pa nodded.

"After your own stubbornness burned my home over my head?"

"Seems you had to traipse over to Lucy's and leave the dinner cooking—"

"Amos Todd, if that house were insured, you'd be grinning your head off, instead of sitting there black as Satan! Indeed, it wouldn't have burned down if you'd 'a' fixed the chimney."

"Nothing wrong with the chimney," Pa muttered.

"Amos Todd, not another word! Where's money coming from to build us a new house? Where are we going to sleep?"

"I came out to this country," Pa said, "and built me a sod house. I can do it again."

"If you expect me to sleep in a sod house, Amos Todd, you can say good-bye to me right now. I've taken your contrariness for twenty-eight years, but this is too much. Jackie,

you come along with me. Come along, Lucy. You too, Tom."

"Where are you going?" Pa demanded.

"Up to Lucy's. And when you've built a house fit and proper for womenfolk and children, then I'll come back! And not until then!"

"Reckon a sod house was good enough for me once, and it's good enough now," Pa muttered.

Pa built his sod house without windows, and when he closed up the door, not a sound could come through. I guess that was why they decided to steal his stock. Rustling by herding cows into a closed truck and then driving away with them was going on all through the section, but the cattle thieves hardly ever went right into a barn. The stock made too much noise when you woke them up at night.

But Pa built his sod hut without windows. He told me that was the way they all built them in the old times. Ma was sending me down three times a day with cooked food, so it wasn't much different for Pa from when he had slept in the barn. Except that he didn't have the animals for company. And if he had been in the barn, the stock wouldn't have been stolen.

He had been living in the sod hut for more than a month when I came over one morning with his breakfast. I found him at the barn, which was half empty.

"Hullo, Jackie," he said. "How's your Ma?"

"Just fine. She sent buckwheat cakes down this morning. She knows you like them."

"I sure like buckwheat cakes."

"Where's all the stock?" I asked.

"Stolen—"

"Stolen?" I said.

"Sure enough. I couldn't hear a sound in that sod house. They drove in with one of them trailer trucks and loaded everything on."

"Well, didn't you call the sheriff?"

"Not yet. Back in the old days, I would have gone after them myself. But I ain't so spry now."

We walked over to the sod house, and Pa began to eat the buckwheat cakes. "Jackie," he said, "does your Ma ask after me?"

"Sure enough."

"Suppose I went up there now. Think she'd be gentle enough for me to talk to her? I ought to tell her about the stock."

"You can't go up there now," I said.

"Can't? Why not?"

"Because Aunt Effie's there. She and Uncle Ely are visiting with Ma and Lucy."

"What?"

"Sure enough," I said.

"Then I'm going up there right this minute! Time I gave Effie a piece of my mind! This whole business comes of Effie getting a hold of Lucy!"

I knew it wasn't any use to argue with Pa once he had his mind set, so I just followed him over the fields and up the hill to Tom's house. The house was set on the other side of the hill, so Pa had never seen it before. Now I could hear him muttering under his breath, the house looked so white and pretty.

Pa stamped around to the front and up the porch, and the first person he met was Aunt Effie herself. He hadn't seen her in twenty years, and now he just stopped and stared.

"Amos," she whispered.

"Hello, Effie," Pa said. He just stood there meek as a lamb.

"Amos, you're looking fine," Aunt Effie said.

"You're looking fine yourself, Effie," Pa muttered.

"Haven't changed a bit."

"We don't get younger," Pa said.

And then they just stood there and looked at one another until Ma came out and saw them there.

It was later, at the dinner table, after Pa had told about his stock being stolen, that Aunt Effie said:

"Now you young folks wouldn't know, but a long time back four drunken Indians burned down your Pa's barn. And Amos didn't turn to no sheriff either. He just lit out after them and chased them across three states until he caught them and fetched them back."

Pa shook his head. "Effie," he said, "you shouldn't talk about such things. It was a mighty wrong thing I did, going off and leaving my family that way. I should have just sworn out a warrant and minded my own business."

And then he just bent over and finished eating his soup without looking up once.

Sun in the West



SUN IN THE WEST

OF THE different stages in the life of Mercy Ross, this was the period of terror; this was the time when she was made and molded of fine metal.

As a child, she had been timid. Perhaps her name, Mercy, had something to do with that, even though she smiled when she remembered her timidity now. A timid woman does not come into a new land, and a timid woman does not live day and night with the wilderness touching her doorstep.

Perrin Ross, her husband, had brought her from Connecticut to the Wyoming Valley, in Pennsylvania. Perrin had cleared the wilderness, and she had built with him. She had borne Perrin five children, and a sixth lay in her loins. No timidity; she was tall, blue-eyed, sunburned, strong. She walked with the confident stride of a man. She could smile when she heard the wolves howling at night.

Withal, she was Mercy Ross; and she would touch her yellow hair and think of it covered with fine lace, the way ladies wore it in the East. Or dream of neighbors close by

in the precise Connecticut countryside. Or dances at night. Or a school for her children. Deep inside of her was a fear of the wild.

That was on a June morning in 1778, when her husband rode up to the farm on a lathered horse. Then, as she had known it would some day, the wild closed down upon her.

When she had awakened that morning, Perrin had already gone. Her brother Jonathan said he would be back soon. "Militia business," Jonathan said, cleaning and loading his long rifle. Perrin was a lieutenant of militia in the valley. Most of the young men in the valley had gone east to General Washington's army. The married men formed a company of militia. Jonathan was only sixteen—too young for the army, but able to play with the idea of being a militiaman. He cleaned his rifle, loaded it, and looked wise. But not a word more than that would he tell Mercy—that Perrin had gone out on militia business.

Mercy felt it. She felt what was coming, felt the tightening under her heart that was meaning for a woman on the frontier. She was not yet thirty, and she had borne five children to people the frontier; another she had carried for six months. How would it come to life—in a fire of destruction? She was tired; she wanted to be a woman, to rest.

She went out of the house that morning, and the sun was shining. A hot haze lay over the lush green of the valley. It was a land of Canaan, a place of fruitfulness. Drawing water from the well, she noticed a thread of smoke to the north. A house burning? She dismissed the thought and called the children.

How they hated to wash! For once she was glad, and she didn't have the heart to scold them. Things like that

were real: the unreality lay in thin, freckled Jonathan, cleaning his rifle.

Patience said, "Mother, you're rare beautiful." Patience was five years old, with hair and eyes like her mother's. It made Mercy's heart ache to watch her. She told herself *I'm a fool. There's nothing wrong, nothing.*

Jonathan, rifle in hand, walked out to the road, stared at the thread of smoke.

Mercy said, with forced cheerfulness, "Like as not you didn't even wash your neck. Come over here," thinking that would take him down a peg or two; Jonathan had grown like a reed.

He grinned. Again she told herself that her fears were foolish. Perrin would be back soon, and then all would be well.

The children were making a great fuss, and one of them had overturned the wash water. Cully was stirring it into mud. Mercy could see how that was; they were in their own world. Their world was compact and reasonable, and for them that thread of smoke upon the northern horizon did not exist. Automatically, she scolded the children. Spare the rod and they became a pack of wild Indians.

And then she saw that the children were listening. Jonathan yelled something. She heard the thud of hoofs like the staccato beat of a drum. Drums and men marching, waving their guns the way Jonathan waved his.

Perrin rode up on a lathered horse. Then she knew—as if the thread of smoke were a sign for the future, all the future. The children ran toward Perrin, but she caught up Billy, the youngest, to her breast. Jonathan's face was set

seriously; how he wanted to be a man! Inside her, the unborn child was kicking, moving—or was that her imagination?

Perrin dismounted, and then Mercy was listening to his words, words that were an intrusion no sensible woman would bear. What did she have to do with all this? Her business was to be a mother, to make her children's lives out of peace and out of the fruitfulness of this new land. She shook her head, all the while watching the thread of smoke.

"The Lees' household," Perrin panted. "Butler burned it, the damn dirty swine!"

She pleaded: "Perrin, the children. Don't swear." How she wanted to hold onto her way of things.

"He came down from Canada," Perrin went on. "Butler and his Tory rangers and heaven knows how many Indians—carryin' the war west, so they say. Why? They wear the scalps of women and children, take them with a deceitful cruelty—and that's war. Burned out the Lees, murdered the Filmores, burned the Robertses' farm and killed the two little ones."

"The children," Mercy pleaded. Didn't he know of the world of children—to talk like that?

"Let them know; there'll be a reckoning. You ain't staying here. Jonathan'll take you to Forty Fort, and I'll whip up the militia. There'll be a reckoning."

"But no war, Perrin—no war. Butler's a white man, and he'll not wage war on women and children."

"He's a devil," Perrin snapped.

She held him as he surged back onto his lathered horse. She tried to kiss him, but his muscles were tightened like iron, his face a mask. He rode away in a swirl of dust.

She had to right things. Her world had to be a normal

world. Men were children. Didn't he know there would be a child soon? Didn't he know what it meant to have babies? She scolded the children, scolded them out of their fear. Cullen was near tears, and she slapped him across his face. That hurt her.

She cried, "Go into the house and put on shoes, coats!"

Jonathan was off to the stable to harness the horses, Jonathan with a new sense of importance. The children filed into the house. Left alone, Mercy pressed her hands to her face. Had the world gone mad? Weak suddenly, she felt like sinking to the ground, lying there for a long, long time.

In the house, she had to decide what to take and what not to take. Whatever could hurriedly be put in the wagon—whatever was precious, where all things showed the loving care of her hands. The house was her refuge, her anchor, her wall against the wild; and they would burn the house. For a moment, her despair took hold of her and she stared helplessly at the array of things. Then the children flooded in, and she was herself again.

This and that—one with a load of pewter plate, Patience struggling with a spinning wheel, Cullen dragging a blanket: "Keep it from the floor; I never saw such a lot of spoilt children!" It made a mound on the grass in front of the house: pewter, blankets, clothes, smoked hams and a fresh baked duck, a box of eggs.

"That's a heap of stuff," Jonathan said, with judgment. "A heap of stuff."

"Never mind and get it into the wagon," Mercy said.

Jonathan would know his place, notwithstanding all this nonsense about war.

Patience had her doll, the only real Eastern doll in the valley, and Mercy had not the heart to tell her to leave it

behind. Mercy put the children in the wagon; matter-of-fact—everything had to be matter-of-fact. They were going on a trip to Forty Fort.

"The Injuns comin'?" the children asked her.

"That's nonsense," Mercy snapped. "We'll be back here tomorrow." She called: "Jonathan—put the cover on the well."

He came out of the stable carrying his rifle. "I'd like fine to see an Injun!" he cried, waving the gun.

"You get in the wagon and drive—or I will."

"I'll drive," Jonathan nodded.

They came to Forty Fort, and they were not the only ones. Wagons and horses, and women on foot bearing their children in their arms. And immediately Mercy had a sense of kinship, of being no longer alone. They would understand; they would know what it meant to bear a child and to have five others who depended upon you.

Hannah Stevens was there by the gate. Mercy had noticed how few the men were, and she asked Hannah.

"Milishy," Hannah snorted. "Them an' their fool milishy. They're out gathering an' preparing to make war."

Mercy shook her head. Jonathan was off already, hobnobbing with a crowd of boys. She lifted the children out of the wagon and let them run free in the common of the stockade. This was a fine treat for them, to meet boys and girls from miles up and down the valley, to be able to play at Indians.

Lucy Free made her sit down. "Rest," she said. "You leave war to the fool menfolk. How many months is it now?"

"Six," Mercy answered with pride. She could never get over that feeling of pride. Life out of her.

"A man-child," Hannah nodded. "You have the look of it."

"What look?" Mercy smiled. When she smiled, she was young again, lovely—the brown skin like velvet against her yellow hair.

"When it brings a pretty face, it's a man-child."

"You're poking fun at me," Mercy protested.

Old Mrs. Kennet brought her a glass of warm milk. "For the child," she insisted.

Fanny Bullet had her knitting. She was knitting a little thing for the child. "For your man-child," she told Mercy.

"I'm lacking the patience to knit," Mercy said.

"I have a rare wonderful recipe to cure morning sickness. Jell a calf's hoof and flavor with mint leaves." Mrs. Kennet always had recipes, scores of them for everything.

They gossiped until sundown. They talked about everything under the sun, except about the hostile Indians that had come into the valley. In the women, Mercy found refuge.

A messenger came, down from the northern end of the valley, to tell old Mrs. Kennet that her house was burning. It made Mercy's skin crawl to see the old lady's grim smile.

Mrs. Kennet cried, "You go back and tell Butler that I'll burn his some day—lock, stock and barrel, me or mine."

About an hour after that, the militia assembled. Perrin was there—Perrin, tall and strong and broad, a man to break barriers and to conquer. He folded Mercy in his arms, kissed her, and told her she was beautiful, like a girl. How long since he had told her that?

She saw it in his eyes. "Perrin," she cried, "they've burned the house!"

He hesitated—then nodded.

"It's all over."

"No—I'll build another."

"It's over, Perrin. Don't leave me!"

She saw the hate in his eyes, the deep, burning hatred of a man who has worked hard, and whose work has been for nothing. He attempted to hide it, holding her close, kissing her. But she knew; he was lost, and the wild had claimed him.

Then there was no consolation in the presence of the women. She was alone in a land that was hard and ruthless and inhuman.

She crouched alone near the stockade when the militia marched out of the fort. Perrin was with them—marching out of her life. Jonathan, too, a tall, gawky boy, holding his long rifle.

They marched out, about four hundred of them, men and boys, to do battle with the invaders of their land. Left in the fort were several hundred women and children, and a few old men. They marched out smiling with assurance, and some of the women cried to see them go. But most of the women watched them with stony faces, saying nothing at all.

After they had gone, Mercy fed the children and put them to bed. They were too excited to sleep. Their beds were laid out in the wagon, and for hours they spoke in low, frightened whispers.

There were fires all over the common, women speaking in hoarse, controlled tones, trying to forget that their men were outside—somewhere. Mercy had to be alone. She went into one of the cabins, one that was used as a storehouse.

She was trembling now. She remained there for a long time, staring into the dark.

They knew the next day that a battle had been fought. It came as a dread, ominous message on the wind. It came as a rustle of things burning, of destruction.

Dry-eyed, Mercy did things that had to be done. The children were washed, fed. She had no appetite, but she ate. There was life inside her, life that had to be nourished. Five children were a handful, but there were other women who could do almost nothing. Mercy helped them. Some of the women—Hannah Stevens, for instance—took muskets and mounted guard on the firing steps. But Mercy hated the feel of a musket.

The first news of the battle was a boy who stumbled into the stockade, bleeding from a dozen wounds. He died in Mrs. Kennet's arm, while she screamed curses on Butler's head.

The survivors straggled in, wounded, bloodstained, dazed by the horror they had seen. There were precious few of them, less than a dozen, and most of them could only tell with their eyes what had been. What could they say to these women whose men were out there?

Someone crying, "Where are our men? Where are our men?" . . . "My husband—Jerry Feenin—you saw him? You must have seen him, a great, strong man with red hair." But they were all strong men.

Bob Passer, the hair on his head gone, whispered, "They're dead—all o' them. They had us two to one, blew us to bits and we nowadays saw them, fighting from ambush in their Injun way."

"You fools—fools!"

"It was not our fault—we noways saw them."

Mercy saw faces turn to stone, wondered what her own face was like, felt the steel forming inside of her. What land was this, and what had she to do here?

Pat Kennen came to her. He said, "Mrs. Ross—"

"I know—Perrin's dead."

"He died easy, a bullet that gave him no pain before he died."

Strong, beautiful Perrin—Perrin who had defied the wild and taken from the wild. And now it had taken back its own.

"Jonathan?" she whispered.

"He—he—"

"Tell me!"

Kennen nodded, unable to speak.

Her children were sobbing, clinging to her skirts. A great weight for her to bear—too great a weight. She had to rest, lie down, ease herself. Perrin dead, Jonathan dead; what was left now?

She had to feed her children. Death comes, life passes, yet children have to be fed. The other women, too: hardly anyone wept, but there were faces of stone while they fed their children. And when Cullen sobbed, Mercy cried:

"I'll have none of that! You mind your food!"

A cloud of dark smoke over the face of the sun. Hannah Stevens took her children for a while. Mercy went to the gate, stared out at the wilderness. Tears were beyond her, and she stood there dry-eyed.

Then her mind was made up. She saw only one thing: the quiet countryside of Connecticut, where there was peace. She walked back through the fort, through hundreds of women who were stricken with death, through a terrible,

subdued hum of sorrow. She came to Hannah Stevens and said:

"I'm leaving Forty Fort tonight."

"Mercy—you're mad."

"I'm sane enough. There's nothing left for me here now. I only want peace."

"But not tonight."

"Tomorrow it will be too late. I feel that."

They left Forty Fort that same night, under the cover of a dark, starless sky. A dozen women had decided to accompany Mercy. Together with their children, with Lem Seely, the one old man the fort could spare them, they made a party of thirty-odd souls. They stood a little while in the gateway of the fort. Some of the women who were left wept quietly; some said a few words of encouragement.

Then Forty Fort was behind them, and they were picking their way through the dark forest toward Wilkes-Barre and the river. Eastward, across two hundred miles of wilderness, lay their homes in Connecticut.

Mercy walked with the man, with Lem Seely, who was past sixty and who chattered endlessly. She heard little that he said; she was conscious of two things: that her face was turned eastward, and that Perrin had gone out of her life. Perrin was dead, and Perrin's dreams were dead. The wild had defeated them. Now there was only a desire for peace, for the cessation of fear. Within her she could sense the movements of her unborn child; she carried Billy in her arms, where he slept blissfully.

That was her life, only that, only her children; and the only purpose of her life now was to gain peace for them. Once life had been different for her, and even now, as she

stumbled through the forest in the dark, there was a picture of that.

There was a picture of a tall, blue-eyed, light-haired girl who walked at the side of Perrin Ross into a new land. There was a picture of Perrin felling logs to make their house. There was a picture of that house, rising out of the strength of Perrin's arms. Now, all that was done. She was on the way back.

They walked for hours through the night. They crossed the river above Wilkes-Barre. Mercy felt the water swirling about her thighs as she waded through, her child in her arms. Twice more she made the passage, taking a child each time. Old Lem carried the rest.

They went on then. Some of the children wept from sheer weariness. Sometimes they fell over roots in the dark. They had to be careful. There were Indians near by.

At last they could go no farther. They had reached Solomon's Gap, and beneath them stretched the dreadful wilderness of the Pocono swamps. They dropped on the ground, and many of them slept where they lay. But some of the women could not sleep, only look into the dark and wonder.

Mercy was one of these. She stood for a while beside old Lem.

Lem said, "It'll be hard, but not so hard that we won't get through."

"Hard for the children," Mercy said.

They went on. Seemingly endless were the Pocono swamps, black mud and a roof of trees to hide the sun. Black mud sucked at their feet each time they took a step. The sun shone no more. A child died; they buried it in the mud and there was no stone to mark its grave. Mercy

thanked God that it was not hers—craved forgiveness for her selfishness. A fear of the mud: where could they sleep and where could they rest? What little food they had brought with them was used up. Sometimes old Lem shot a squirrel, once a chuck. They became lean specters of women and children. Now, when old Lem tried to laugh, nobody laughed with him.

They went on and on. Mercy's flesh dropped away. She was no longer strong and round and lovely; her face had become lean and haggard. Her body cried out for food: there were two to feed; and her children looked at her with hungry, sunken eyes. She would say to them, "Only a little farther—only a bit more." Words that her own face belied.

They were lost. Old Lem admitted it with tears in his eyes. Some of the women wept, but Mercy said nothing. Her tired, thin face was obsessed by an idea—peace for her children, only that.

For her children: Perrin would understand; Perrin would know that they must live, that a woman alone cannot face the wild.

Then, ten days after they had entered the morass, they came out of it, came into a land of rolling green hills, of scattered farms.

Four years had passed. Thirteen scattered colonies at war with Great Britain were now a nation at peace. The massacre and horror at Wyoming were already a memory.

But for Mercy Ross, the memory was more than a memory, and Perrin and Jonathan and the lush green valley of the Wyoming pervaded her dreams. She had come back to Connecticut and her child had been born: a man-child, as they said, and she called it Perrin.

Her maiden aunt, Celia, said: "I'd 'a' known no good would come of that scamp."

But she saw Mercy's face, and she said no more. A girl had gone away and a woman had come back.

Her beauty returned, her calm, splendid beauty that marked her face with her name; but the lines of sorrow and longing were never erased from her face.

She lived with her aunt and mother. They said she should forget. The West was wilderness, no fit place for woman-kind. Her silence might have been agreement. She had peace at last, the peace she wanted so desperately for her children's sake. She never spoke of what had been at Wyoming, and the children forgot very quickly. Even Perrin, they forgot.

A man came back from the war. Like most of the men who had fought through the war, he wanted peace and rest—and the love of a woman. He needed them desperately, and in the quiet of the Connecticut countryside he found the first two.

When he saw Mercy Ross, he considered that he had found the third.

His name was Samuel Allen; he was tall and strong, a man who knew what he wanted and would have it, a man almost like Perrin. Yet he was not Perrin.

Somehow, Mercy had never thought that there could be another man after Perrin. When Perrin died, some of the world had died—a world he made for her. But Sam Allen wanted her; after the hell of war, her beauty was peace and refuge for him.

He told her that; he also told her that what he wanted, he got.

Vaguely, Mercy feared him. That was after she had learned to care for him—love him, she thought sometimes. It took many months. He was a solid, undemanding type—the type she could lean on. He would come over in the evening, sit on her porch and smoke his pipe. He would smell of fresh-turned dirt, of growing things on a farm, the smell she always associated with Perrin. He asked little and he gave a great deal.

The children took to him easily—so easily that it frightened Mercy. That and his restlessness; his restlessness was not the uneasy, nervous kind: it was a fire burning within him, and she would see it sometimes when he turned his face westward toward the setting sun.

She told him the story of the Wyoming, of Forty Fort and the flight through the wilderness. It was the first time she had spoken of it to anyone. He listened in silence; even after she had finished, he kept his silence a long time. Finally, he asked: "This Wyoming country—it seems a fair, fruitful land."

"Perrin said, the land of Canaan," she told him.

"I would like to set my eyes upon it," he said thoughtfully. And then he said: "A man would want a woman—a strong, proud woman."

After that, Mercy feared him.

Yet when a day passed and he didn't come, she felt strangely alone, troubled. And when he came again, she would welcome him with her calm open smile.

She was afraid. Peace for the children, for herself. Wasn't that all that she desired? Wasn't that why she had suffered? She hardly knew now. When he stared westward, the way Perrin had stared, as though the world lay to the west—

He asked her to marry him.

Mercy said slowly, "I would be no wife for a strong man. There's fear in me, dreadful fear."

"Of that?" he demanded, pointing westward.

She nodded.

"There's no fear with a man like me," he said, almost harshly. "A woman's not made to live alone." Then he rose and walked quickly away.

Mercy was thinking, *Alone—always alone*. She shivered, put her face in her hands. The children would grow, forget, have their own lives; but what would there be for her?

He came again the following night, sat down on the porch, packed his pipe and lit it.

He sat there for a while, smoking. It was good for Mercy to have him there, a strong man to lean on. A man like him—always.

"I made up my mind," he said finally. "I'm going West. I'll not root in a stubble when there's broad lands to be taken."

She stared at him, not speaking.

"I'm going to the Wyoming Valley. It's a fair, beautiful land, and I'll take some of it."

Still she did not speak. He was going. As Perrin had gone, so was he going. He would go out of her life and there would be no other. Slowly she rose and walked toward him; and even as she walked, it came back to her—the Forty Fort, the wilderness. She stood before him, and he said softly:

"I'll have no woman who fears to go where her man leads."

"I'll go," Mercy said.

"Without fear?"

"Without fear."

She knew it then, and long ago Perrin had been right in choosing her destiny. There would be no peace and no rest; but there would be dreams to be realized.

Then Sam Allen took her in his arms, and then she was happy—for the first time since Perrin had dashed up to the house, so many years ago.

When they came down from Solomon's Gap, crossed the river, and went north through the valley to where her home had been, the children were already pointing out things that they remembered. They remembered; they were laughing: it brought a thrill of gladness to Mercy's heart.

And when they came to the burned ruins of the house, Sam Allen stood next to her, silent, and Mercy wept. The tears came easily now. They were facing westward, and the sun was setting; and the children had paused to watch the setting sun.

IO

The Bookman





THE BOOKMAN

WE WERE very poor, but we were never so poor as the soldiers. Before the war, it had been different, but as the war went on, we got poorer and poorer, yet we were never so poor as the soldiers.

I think it was in the fall of seventeen eighty that the soldiers were all encamped down in the valley beyond our house. It was just at the beginning of the winter, and the day they came, a film of snow covered the whole valley down to the river, which you could see from our house. Our house stood on a hill, commanding the valley and the river and the plain beyond it. Mother always watched the valley. She said that when father came back, we should see him riding up the valley all the way from the river. Father was with the Third Continentals, a captain. But this was before he was killed.

The soldiers came marching down the river-side, along the dirt road, and they turned up the valley, where they prepared to encamp. They were part of the New Jersey line, all of them very tired-looking men, and very thin. We ran down to meet them, and they all waved to us. I was ashamed of myself, I was so fat and healthy.

An officer on a horse was riding in front, an aide a little way behind him. When he saw me, he cantered over, drawing up his horse close beside me, and leaning over the pommel.

"Hello there, sonny," he said.

I didn't say anything, because I thought that maybe he would be thinking of how fat I was, he being so thin. His uniform was all torn and dirty, and his cocked hat flapped wearily. But I liked his face. It was hard and thin, but it had small, dancing blue eyes.

However, I didn't want him to think me entirely a dunce, and I saluted him smartly.

"Well, well," he smiled, "you've the makings, haven't you, sir? And how old might you be?"

"I'm ten, sir."

"And what might be your name?"

"Bently Corbatt, sir."

"And I suppose you live in the big house on the hill? Is this your sister?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, a little ashamed because Ann was so small. "But I've got another, sir."

"Another house?" he questioned, still smiling.

"No, sir. Another sister, who's much bigger than Ann here. And won't you come up to the house, sir?"

"Well—you're not Tories, then?"

"Oh, no, sir," I said quickly, and then added: "My father's with the Third Continentals. He's a captain," I finished proudly.

"Well," he said, not smiling now. He stared at me thoughtfully and then shifted his gaze to our house. "Well," he said again. Then: "I'm General Wayne. I suppose you'll be very kind and introduce me to your mother?"

"She's dead, sir."

"I'm sorry. Then your sister, if she's the lady of the house."

I nodded. Bending over, he grasped me about the waist, lifting me to the saddle in front of him. Then he motioned for the aide to do the same with Ann, and we set off for the house.

"When did your mother die, sonny?" he asked me, as we cantered along.

"About three weeks ago—only." I told him about how she used to watch the valley all the time. "You see, father doesn't know yet," I said. "Sis thought it would be best not to let him know."

"I see," he nodded gravely, but now his blue eyes were warm and merry; I don't think they ever lost that merry look. I twisted around him, so that I could see the troops marching into the valley. Now they were passing through our orchard, and many stooped to pick up rotten apples from the ground. His eyes followed mine. "It's pretty hard, this business of war, isn't it—for soldiers?" He seemed to include me in the last part.

"Not too hard," I answered evenly, "for soldiers."

Jane was waiting for us on the porch, looking very grave, the way she looked since mother had died. We rode up, and the general lifted me down to the porch. Then he dismounted himself, bowing very nicely to Jane, sweeping off his cocked hat with a graceful gesture, just as if it wasn't so battered and torn.

"Miss Corbatt?" The general said.

Jane nodded.

"I am General Wayne of the Continental Army, Pennsylvania line. I have two thousand troops, which I would like to encamp in that valley, for a few weeks only—I hope

—but possibly for a good part of the winter. I presume the property is yours?”

“Yes.” Jane courtesied to him. “Yes, the property is my father’s. Won’t you come inside? We can talk about it there.”

General Wayne entered the house after Jane, and his aide followed, and I followed his aide. Ann tried to follow me, but I pushed her back. “This is no place for little girls,” I warned her.

In the living-room, I wasn’t noticed, and I made myself small in a corner. Jane sat in a chair, looking very pretty, I thought, and the two officers stood in front of her.

“You see,” General Wayne was saying, “we can’t be too far from the British—and we can’t be too near. This spot is ideal.”

“I think I understand.”

“But you know what soldiers are—two thousand half-starved soldiers.”

“My father is with the army, sir.”

“Thank you, then. You are a very brave girl.”

“No, no,” Jane said quickly. “I’m doing nothing. Don’t you see that it is safer with the troops here?”

General Wayne smiled sadly. “I’m afraid not. It is not very nice to have one’s home turned into a battleground. Yet war is a bitter business all around.”

“I know,” Jane said.

“We should want to use your home as general headquarters. It will mean quartering myself and two or three officers. And a room to undertake business—”

Jane bent her head. “I hope you will be comfortable,” she said.

“You are very kind. And now, if you will excuse me,

you can make all arrangements with Captain Jones here."

The general left the room, and I followed him. Outside, he looked at me curiously.

"I suppose," he said thoughtfully, "that you will want to be a soldier some day?"

"Yes, sir."

His face was very grave, his mouth thin as a thread; with one hand, he shook out my long hair; the other was clasping and unclasping itself nervously. "Suppose," he considered—"suppose I make you a sort of general's special aide, to look after things I miss on?"

I was thrilling with pride, and I could hardly keep from bursting into shouts of pure joy; however, I managed to stand very still, saluting him. "That will be very fine, sir," I said. And I stood looking after him as he rode down into the valley.

I couldn't go in just yet. I had to stand there for a while, and be alone in my glory; so I remained as he left me, very still, looking over the valley to where the sun was setting, making the river a band of gleaming red. Then, after a little while, I went inside.

I heard Jane laughing in the parlor, and it surprised me. It was the first time she had laughed since mother died. I went in, and there she was, standing with the aide, laughing at something he had said. When she saw me, she stopped, and Captain Jones came forward, offering me his hand.

"How do you do, sir," I said, with dignity, since I was of the army now.

"How do you do," he answered.

"Captain Jones and General Wayne and some others will live at the house, Bently," Jane told me.

"I know," I replied.

I turned to go, and as I left the room, I heard Captain Jones saying: "I must apologize for my regimentals. We're pretty close to being beggars now—all of us."

The next few days were as exciting as any I had known. I had always considered our house a very lonely place, there being nobody I could play with outside of Ann and Jack, the caretaker's boy. And now, all of a sudden, there were two thousand men, encamped in a sprawling fashion through the apple orchard, over the hay-fields, and down the long slope to the river. Almost overnight, bubbles of tents had sprung up all over the place, and in and around our sheds a hundred horses were quartered. On the lawn, in front of our house, there were sixteen field pieces, ugly, sinister things, but oh, how fascinating!

And the soldiers—I made great friends of many of the soldiers before the bookman came, and I will get to the bookman later. I guess General Wayne spread the word around, about the commission he had given me, because the men took to calling me lieutenant, which I was very proud of, though I tried not to show it. I stole cakes and bread for them from the kitchen—not that we had so much, but they had almost nothing at all; and all the time I had to myself, I spent down in their camp. They were always telling me stories, and some of them knew my father. Sometimes, they would let me handle a musket; but the muskets were taller than I, and so heavy I could hardly lift them. What I saw in the camp used to make me sick sometimes. The men were always cold, because they were short of clothing and blankets; hardly any had shoes, and most were woefully thin. It would make me sick, and then I didn't know whether I wanted to be a soldier or not. But the men were always talking about their

pay, which was to come from Philadelphia some day, and how much better all things would be after that.

The winter stole on, and the men remained in the valley. More men came, until there were almost three thousand of them. At night, their fires twinkled like glow-worms, and in the daytime they were always drilling and parading. I didn't know why they drilled so much, but one day Captain Jones told me the reason. He said it was to keep them knowing that they were soldiers, and to make them forget that they were starving. I wondered how men could starve, yet live so long; but war is very strange, and you do not understand all the parts of it.

Our house became a busy place. In the parlor, General Wayne set up his main headquarters, and sometimes he sat there all day writing at his desk, receiving couriers, and dispatching couriers, too. I knew that most of his writing was for pay and food for his soldiers, because that was the main topic of talk. All day, men rode up to our house and away from it, and many times in the night I woke to hear a horse stamping his hoofs in front of the door.

I guess during that time Jane came to sort of like Captain Jones, and I guess she couldn't help it, he being around the house so much, and being such a handsome young gentleman, not at all thin and worn, like General Wayne.

Then the bookman came, after the troops had been in the valley for almost three weeks. They don't have many bookmen any more, men who wander around the country, stopping at houses to peddle books and give away news. Many of them write their own books, publish them, and peddle them. That is what Parson Weems did with his stories of General Washington.

Well, the bookman came one day toward evening, not from the river valley, but riding the trail that trickled over the hills. He was dressed in worn homespun, an old broad-brimmed hat on his head, and a great pack of books on either side of his saddle. He didn't come to the house, but stopped at the barn, and I ran over to see what he had to sell. I knew he was a bookman, and I knew how rarely bookmen came nowadays.

"Hello," I called. "Hello, there, you bookman, you!"

He looked at me very gravely, and right there I liked him, from the beginning. He had little blue eyes, like General Wayne's, always sparkling, and long yellow hair that fell to his shoulders. He seemed very old to me then, as most grown-ups did, but he couldn't have been much past thirty.

"Hello, sir," he said. He had a funny accent, vaguely familiar, and I took it to be back country talk. "Yes," he went on, "how do you do?"

"Fine," I answered. "And I hope you have English books, though Jane says I shouldn't read them now."

"And why shouldn't you read them now?" he asked.

"You know we're at war."

"Oh, yes, I do know it. I had a devil of a time getting through the sentries." He spoke as if he didn't approve of sentries of war. And then his eyes roved past me, down into the valley. He seemed surprised when he saw all the tents and soldiers.

"That looks like a big encampment," he said.

"Yes," I nodded proudly, "most all of the New Jersey line."

But he did not seem to wish to speak of the troops or the war. "What kind of books do you like?" he inquired, measuring me with his eyes.

Then I remembered my manners. "Won't you come in," I asked him, "and have something hot to drink. I am sure my sister would like your books, too."

Picking up his packs, he followed me into the kitchen, and while Mary, the cook, put up the kettle, I ran to call Jane. Jane liked bookmen, because they made things less lonely. "I'm sorry," she told him, "that you have to eat in the kitchen, but our house has become a regular military depot. I should like to offer you tea, but you know that we have none now."

"You are a very loyal family, aren't you?" the bookman said.

"My father is with the Third Continentals," Jane said quietly.

The bookman looked at her, as though he knew what Jane was probably thinking, how much more likely it would be for a strong man like him to be in the army than wandering around with a pack of books. And then he said, a slow smile coming to his lips: "But somebody has to sell books. They are as necessary as war."

"Perhaps," Jane answered him.

I went out then, because Ann was calling me, and together we walked down into the valley. When I came back, the bookman was showing Jane his books.

He and Jane were close together, kneeling on the floor, where the books were spread out, and there, in the fading twilight, his yellow head made a very nice contrast with Jane's dark one. When I came in, Jane glanced at me.

"Don't you want to look at the books, Bently?"

"I was down in the valley," I said importantly, "and there's a great bustle there. I think that the troops are going to move soon, maybe at the end of this week or before that."

The bookman was looking at me very curiously, which I thought strange for a person who had so little interest in war. But a moment later, I had forgotten that, and I was looking at the books with Jane. He had a great many books for children, fascinating books full of pictures, such books as we saw very little of. And he seemed to have read every book, for he spoke of them in a way that no other person I had known ever had. He spoke of the books Jane wanted, too, and I could see that there was a lot in him that fascinated Jane, the same way it fascinated me.

I had my dinner, and after dinner, Jane was still with the bookman talking about books and other things. Then I went out on the porch, where Captain Jones was smoking his pipe.

"Who is that tattered wreck?" Captain Jones asked me.

"Oh, he's just a bookman."

"Just a bookman, eh?"

"Yes," I nodded, and then I sat down to keep him company.

That evening I sat in the kitchen, listening to the bookman. His stories weren't like the soldiers', about war, but about strange, distant lands. I could see right away that he liked me, and I was drawn to him more than I had ever been drawn to a stranger before. Later, Jane sat before the fire with us, and most of the talk was between her and the bookman. I remember some of the things he said.

"Egypt—like an old jewel in the sand. There are three of the great pyramids, and they stand all together, and if you watch the sun set behind them—" And that sort of thing, for there seemed to be no land that he had not visited, al-

though how this should be so with a bookman, neither of us knew.

"And the war—?" Jane once said to him.

"I sometimes wonder about the war," he answered, "but I don't know whether it is right or wrong. This new land is so big, so wild—why should anyone fight about it?"

"It is a very beautiful land, this America of ours," Jane said.

"Yes, with beautiful women."

I don't know whether Jane resented that or not, but she said nothing.

"Brave men and beautiful women," the bookman went on. "Oh, don't I know—how those men in the valley are so slowly starving. As ugly as war is, it makes more than men of us."

"Yet you do not believe enough to fight?"

"Are there not enough—shedding blood?"

"I suppose so."

"I love books," the bookman said. "I used to dream of a great house, when I could live out my days comfortably and slowly, with many, many books around me—and peace. I used to dream of that."

"I know," Jane nodded.

"Funny, how you dream, isn't it?"

When I went up to bed, Jane was still there with the bookman, talking. Jane said: "Good night, Bently," and the bookman shook hands with me. "Don't love war too much, boy," he said.

That night I dreamt of the things the bookman told me. He was to sleep in the barn, since there was no more room

in the house, and I hoped I should see him the next morning.

The following day, there was more bustle than ever in the camp. All morning, it snowed; but the men were out, drilling in the snow, and new troops were trickling in all the time. At the house, General Wayne was in a fury of excitement, and I didn't dare go into the parlor. Once, a tall, tired-looking man rode up with a couple of aides, and he was with General Wayne for more than an hour. I heard the sentries whispering that it was General Washington; but he did not seem to be at all the great man I had heard of, only a tall, tired-looking person in a uniform patched all over.

I went to the kitchen, to examine the books the bookman had left, and while I was there, he came in. I was glad he had not gone. I hoped Jane would like him a great deal, perhaps induce him to remain a fortnight. I would have been content to listen forever to his smooth, enchanting voice.

"I want you to read this," he said. It was Malory's book on King Arthur, and I curled up before the fire with it.

Two more days went by, while the bookman remained, and I noticed that Jane was spending more and more time with him. Nor did Captain Jones enjoy this. Once, I had seen Captain Jones in the tea-room, with Jane in his arms, and I know that whenever Jane spoke of him, there was a funny, far-off look in her eyes. Even now, with the bookman there, Jane grew more and more downhearted as the time came for the troops to depart.

"But the bookman may remain," I once said to her.

"Yes," Jane answered.

The troops were to depart in the morning. That day they began to break camp, and the fieldpieces were wheeled off our lawn, onto the river road. General Wayne was clearing

his affairs in the parlor, and I could see he was more excited than usual.

"The old fox has something up his sleeve," one of the sentries told me.

"It wasn't for nothing he was holdin' that palaver with General Washington," another said.

There was nothing much for me to do, since everyone was so busy, and I went to look for the bookman. I climbed to the little room he had, over the hayloft, and I thought I would surprise him. There was a crack in the door, and I looked through it. There was the bookman, sitting on the floor, writing in a little pad he held on his knee. Then I knocked. He seemed to stiffen suddenly. The paper he was writing on, he folded, thrust into a crack in the floor, covered his writing materials with hay, and then sauntered to the door. When he saw it was only me, he appeared to be relieved.

"Yes," he said when he had opened the door, "I should be settling things with your sister. I'm to leave soon, and I want to find out what books she'll take."

"You're going?" I said.

"You don't want me to, do you, laddie? But we must all go on, a-wandering. Perhaps I'll come back some day—"

Walking over to the house with him, I almost forgot about the paper. Then I remembered, and excused myself. Without thinking of what I was doing, I ran back to the barn, to his room. I was all trembling with excitement now, for I had quite decided to find out who our bookman really was. I dug up the paper, and began to read:

"Your Excellency:

"I have done my best, yet discovered precious little. There are all of three thousand troops here now, with twenty-two

pieces of ordnance, all told, and they will be moving north the morning you receive this, possibly to connect with General Washington. . . ."

I read on, but my eyes blurred. First I was crying, and good and ashamed of myself; then I realized that the bookman must not find me there. I stumbled down from the loft and out into the snow, the cold air stinging me into awareness, the paper clutched in my hand. The whole world was reeling around me.

"Why did it have to be him?" I muttered.

I guess I went over to the kitchen to look at him again, to see whether it had been my own, splendid bookman. I opened the door quietly, and there was the bookman kissing Jane.

"Go away from here," she whispered.

"You do love me, don't you," he said.

"I don't know—I don't know."

"Then I'll tell you. You do love me, but you have too much pride in that glorious little head of yours. I'm a tattered wanderer, who has fascinated you with his tales, and you certainly would be a fool to throw away yourself on someone like me. But you do love me."

"Yes."

Jane shook her head, and I remember that even then I thought that Jane was truly splendid.

"No," she said, "I'm not sorry. Why should I be sorry? I love you—that's all there is to it."

"Then you know. In the few days I've been here, you know."

"Yes, I know."

I could see the bookman's face from the side, and I don't think I ever saw a sadder face than that. And beautiful, too,

what with all his yellow hair falling to his shoulders. I don't know how, knowing what I knew, I could have stood there, watching all this.

"If you knew all—but thank God you don't. Listen, Jane. I kissed you once. I shan't kiss you again—unless some day I come back. Would you wait?"

"I love you," Jane said. "I know I'll never love anyone else the way I love you."

I couldn't stand any more of that. I went up to my room and cried. Then I remembered that a Continental doesn't cry; I think I remembered my commission.

General Wayne was in the parlor when I came in, and I could see that he was annoyed, being so busy. But he nodded to me.

"And what is your business, sir?" he inquired.

"Could I ask you something?"

The general pushed his papers aside. Now his eyes were twinkling, and I knew he would take some time with me. He had always liked me.

"Suppose a soldier runs away?" I said.

"There are times when the best do—have to," the general smiled.

"But suppose he knows his duty is to advance?"

"Then he's a coward—and a traitor," the general said slowly, staring at me very curiously.

"He's a coward, sir?"

"Yes."

I gave him the crumpled piece of paper. But I didn't cry then; I looked straight at him.

"What's this?" He read it through, puckered up his lips, and read it through again. "My God," he whispered, "where did you get this, child!"

I told him. I told him where he could find the bookman, and then I said:

"Will you excuse me now, sir?" I knew that something would happen inside of me, if I didn't get away very quickly.

They shot the bookman that evening. Captain Jones tried to keep Jane in the house. "You mustn't see it," he pleaded with her. "Jane, why on God's earth should you want to see it?"

"Why?" She looked at him wonderingly, and then she put both her hands up against his face. "You love me, don't you, Jack?"

"You know it by now."

"And you know what funny things love does to you. Well, that is why I must see it—must."

But he didn't understand; neither did I just then.

General Wayne came by while they were talking, and he stopped, staring at the group of us. Then he said, brusquely: "Let them see it, Captain, if they want to. I don't think it will hurt Bently. This spy is a brave man."

They stood the bookman up against the side of the barn, up against the stone foundation. He smiled when they offered to blindfold him, and he asked not to have his hands bound.

"Could I talk to him?" I asked.

"Very well, but not for long."

The bookman had a tired look on his face. Until I was close to him, he had been watching Jane. Then he glanced down at me.

"Hello, laddie," he said.

My eyes were full of tears, so I couldn't see him very well now.

"A good soldier doesn't cry," he smiled.

"Yes, I know."

"You want to tell me that you saw me hide the paper, don't you, laddie?"

"Yes."

"And you're sorry now?"

"I had to do it."

"I understand. Give me your hand, laddie."

I went back to Jane then, and she put her arm around me, holding me so tight that it hurt. I was still watching the bookman.

"Sir," the bookman called out, "you will see that my superiors are informed. My name is Anthony Engel. My rank Brevet Lieutenant Colonel."

General Wayne nodded. Then the rifles blazed out, and then the bookman was dead. . . .

II

The Price of Liberty





THE PRICE OF LIBERTY

THE Jew's name was Johnny Ordronaux, and he was a Frenchman before he became an American, which he did because, as he put it: "Only a fool does not go where men fight for freedom." And believe me, his fight is something to sing about, as you will see when I tell you the whole story, the Gospel truth; and you will find it if you go into the matter, even if it is not in the histories.

Ask them, down in the Chesapeake Bay, about Johnny's boat, the *Prince de Neufchâtel*; they remember there, because in all the years of sailing, there was never such a boat as the *Prince*, nor will the great yachtsmen of today deny that. Never such a boat before, nor could one be built again. She sailed like a witch, and men fell in love with her as they would with a woman; so frail, so delicate, so light was she that, as the story goes, she was compounded of tissue paper and the courage of brave men.

Johnny built her himself. Until he put up his bills in Philadelphia, his story is vague; although they do say that he came into the old synagogue one night, when the men were at prayer, and told them:

"There is a time for doing and a time for praying!"

"Wind not wisdom comes from a wide-open mouth," the beadle said. "And who are you, ignorant one, son of a fool?"

"A fool indeed," Johnny Ordronaux answered, and by this time, you may be sure, even the holy prayers were interrupted and necks were being craned to see the source of the disturbance. "A fool, indeed—" His English was very bad, but he told them in Hebrew, "I speak the *tongue*, and my father's father was a rabbi, and on my mother's side, three rabbis in three generations. And all Cohanum," making reference to the old priestly family of Israel; although, as some who were there observed, it was doubtful whether anyone so ugly could boast such a lineage. Small and ugly and pock-marked was Johnny Ordronaux, although his knotted shoulders were wide enough for two and he had the fiery red hair that most Cohanum boast.

"If all that is so," the beadle temporized, being taken somewhat aback by Johnny's Hebrew, "put on a tallith and pray, for as you have just pointed out, there is a time for praying and a time for doing, and this is prayer time, and if you sin any further, though you be the son of a hundred Cohanum, it will not help."

And Johnny Ordronaux prayed that night at the old synagogue in Philadelphia, and after the prayers he gathered the men together and told them his dream of a boat. So well did he speak, that they gave him money and he built the *Prince de Neufchâtel* in Baltimore, the wonder-town of all clip-pers. That was in 1812, when the war had just begun.

Or, at least, so some say. It is hard to tell exactly, after all this time; others say that the great John Paul Jones himself made the drawing for the *Prince*, and Johnny found them in an old book-stall in Paris. Whatever the way, he

built himself the boat, and then he put up his bills in Philadelphia.

A bill was a throwaway plea or advertisement. Remember that in those times, the land was in a bad way, the ports blockaded, commerce gone, and there were traitors everywhere you turned. The only hope lay in the speedy privateers, since they could, very often, run the blockade; give it the wind and nothing on water could catch a Baltimore clipper.

The trouble was to get a crew, for a privateer needed men who were heroes, devils, pirates and revolutionists, all rolled into one; come back a rich man or not at all, and more likely end up under the water or in the hold of an enemy warship. How many men would take a chance like that? That's why the bills, posted and given away, would plead for recruits. Here is what Johnny Ordronaux's bill said:

I AM JOHNNY ORDRONAU
A JEW FROM FRANCE BUT AN AMERICAN
THIS IS THE LAND OF BRAVE MEN
FREE MEN BOLD MEN
I SAIL FOR LIBERTY EQUALITY
INDEPENDENCE
I OFFER SHARES OR WAGES
I WILL TAKE IRISH
JEWS NEGROES GERMANS
PORTUGEE FRENCHMEN
ANY WHO OWN THE NAME
AMERICAN
FILL YOUR HAT WITH GOLD
STRIKE FOR LIBERTY
I SAIL FOR A YEAR
AND A DAY

That was the bill he posted, and some said they opened the jails to find him a crew; but others, who loved liberty and made songs after his great fight, said that perhaps a few of the old graves of the revolution were opened to find him the men he wanted. He put to sea with less than a hundred men and three slim cannon on his beautiful clipper. Of black men, he had no less than twenty-four, of whom eleven were escaped slaves; of Jews, he had twelve, and four were pale scholars from Poland, but Johnny smiled grimly and said, "They will be more than scholars when I finish with them." Nine were Irish from the northern counties, and seven were Irish from the south. And the rest—all shades, all lands, all tongues.

There would have been fighting enough on that clipper before they ever met an enemy, had not Johnny, with his two ham-like fists, emphasized and re-emphasized that they would fight when he ordered them to, and not sooner.

So he kept order in his crew, drilled them and trained them, sent them running aloft and back down, gave them target practice with the trifling cannon, until they handled the lovely little clipper with ease and grace. Indeed, Johnny's voyage promised to be like that of any other successful privateer; they sailed for many months and many thousands of miles, and they took prizes all the way. When they sighted a sail, they would creep up close; if it was one of the King's warships, they would dip their colors in derision, fire a salute, perhaps tack a loop or two to show what they thought of the lumbering dreadnoughts, and then race merrily away; but if it was a fat enemy merchant ship they raised, they would run it down, board it, put a prize crew on it and send it sailing to Bordeaux or Philadelphia or Nantucket, depending on where they were, to be sold on the market

and converted into good solid cash, part for the country, part for the owners, part for the crew.

The story goes that Johnny Ordronaux took eighteen vessels valued at over a million dollars in prize money before he decided to turn back to America. He had been cruising for many months; his crew, by now, was a tough, synchronized fighting machine, although so many had gone aboard the prizes that he had only thirty-six left on his little clipper: but his bottom was fouling; he needed to go into drydock, and he thought longingly of coming to the old synagogue before the high holidays. He recalled how he had said that there was a time for doing and a time for praying; and he had been doing for long enough.

So he ran north through the English Channel, flaunting his sails at all the watchers on the high cliffs. He ran through the North Sea and danced around the Shetlands, and then he ran on the wind to the North American coast. And it was off Nantucket that he saw the British frigate. . . .

Maun Caloway, a giant, coal-black Negro, second mate on the *Prince*, raised up the frigate's sails first from his place in the tops, and he called down, soft but ringing:

"Look a-ho, look a-ho, Johnny—she a forty-four gun devil with the Union Jack!"

Johnny ran into the shrouds himself to see, and everyone else on deck climbed up as far as he could, shouting and hooting at the great British warship. The *Prince* eased off the wind, and Johnny said, enviously and sadly, "By God, some day I like to command one like that."

"What you say we take her, huh?" Portugee Joe, the first mate, grinned.

"That big one, she blockade off Nantucket, huh, Johnny?" the Negro called.

Isaac Gil, the Polish Jew who was both purser and gunner, said, "We'll have some fun with her, Johnny?"

It had been a good voyage, a successful voyage, and only a fool stretches his luck. But what could the little clipper fear from the big, lumbering hull and its forty-four guns?

"We'll have some fun," Johnny agreed.

By now the lookout on the frigate had raised the clipper's sail, and the warship started a tack that would bring it up. Closer and closer she came, until her long bow gun thundered a warning shot that fell a hundred yards short. Then Johnny gave a signal, and the *Prince* danced off.

That was in the morning; there was a brisk breeze then, and for the next two hours the frail clipper played games with the lumbering frigate; she tacked around her, ran before her, cut across her bow, came within yards of gunshot and then danced merrily out of range. Johnny, watching through his glass, could make out the figures on the warship's rigging; he could sense the growing rage of the British captain, a rage based on the fact that any one of the frigate's forty-four guns could blow the little Baltimore clipper out of the water.

Bit by bit, Johnny drew the warship to sea. A day of this, and he might release the port of Nantucket, at least for twenty-four hours. And meanwhile, what better sport than this?

And then, at mid-day, the wind suddenly stopped; both vessels lay motionless on the sea, some two miles apart.

At first, Johnny Ordronaux was not unduly alarmed by the calm. They were beyond the range of the frigate, and sooner or later the breeze would pick up. Yet because he

was a methodical captain, he had the decks cleared for action, and he sent four men below to issue muskets and pikes and cutlasses. He didn't know just what might happen, but if the British commander were angry enough, something certainly would transpire.

For the next hour, nothing happened at all. The Americans crowded the deck, shouted across the water, and critically picked the big warship to pieces. They had a gallery view, and this would certainly be worth telling. And Johnny looked at her longingly and thought of the things he could do with a craft like that under him.

He thought of the great battles a frigate captain might have to his credit, the epic glory, such as surrounded the *Constitution* or the *United States* or any one of the other proud warships of the tiny American fleet. The captain of such a ship might well go down in history, but what more than patriotic piracy lay in store for the skipper of a little Baltimore clipper, beautiful vessel though it might be? Well, he considered to himself, a Jew is still a Jew, and who was he to complain? He at least commanded a clipper under the Stars and Stripes, and how many Jews lay in the ghettos with neither hope nor future?

And then, at an hour past noon, the events began which would give Johnny Ordronaux and the crew of the *Prince de Neufchâtel* at least a small place in the history of this nation. There was bustle and movement on the British warship, and Johnny, putting his glass to his eye, saw that they were launching the ship's boats. One by one, they settled in the water, all of them, the big captain's barge, the longboats, the storming barges, the life-boats. Files of red-coated marines formed on the gun-deck and then climbed over the side into the boats. Brass two-pounders were low-

ered and clamped into place, and then the men of the British crew, gunners, rammers, seamen and pikemen swarmed into the boats until it seemed there would never be an end to them. Then oars bit at the smooth water, and the little armada crept toward the clipper.

Johnny leaped into action. His three pop-gun five-pounders were swiveled around, loaded, and aimed. He ordered all men to the bulwarks with muskets and pikes to repel boarders—except the cook, who was told to blow up his fires and heat to the boiling point whatever pitch he could lay hands on.

The *Prince* was well-stocked with small arms, and they streamed up from the hold until every man had powder and ball for twenty rounds, bird-shot for close quarters, pistols, knives, and even tarry fire grenades to use if there was a chance. For all of that, no one, including Johnny, had any real idea of what the British were up to. Everybody counted the enemy, and it was the consensus of opinion that a hundred and thirty to a hundred and sixty men were on their way to attack the clipper. But Johnny, thinking back, could not recall that he had ever heard of such an attack before; in some ways it was bold, yet how could such an attack fail to succeed when the captain's barge alone was almost as large as the little privateer, and when the Americans were outnumbered four to one? Johnny looked at his men, who were, as I said before, both black and white and Jew and Gentile, and even a heathen or two thrown in; his fears struggled with glory, and back of his mind, perhaps, was the old courtly French phrase: "How, more worshipfully, may honor be conceived?" He leaped on top of the deckhouse, barefooted, as most of his crew were, the better to have their footing, red-sashed with bell pantaloons, two pistols

in his waist and an eight-foot pike in his hands, and he called out:

"By God, this going to be one damned fight! Keep the flag up and fire the cannon when I whistle!"

He had a set of heavy pipes, his one conceit, and his men cheered him and the pipes; then silence settled, men breathing hoarsely, spitting on their hands, seeing to their guns—until at three hundred yards Johnny blew. The three small cannon, the babies of Isaac Gil, belched smoke; a ball cut a swath through the red-coated marines in the captain's barge; another splintered the prow of a small boat; but the third churned the water. One miss was not bad with those tiny targets, although Johnny muttered, "By God, you take a scholar from the ghetto, and he shoots like that, as if we sit here and pop away 'til tomorrow—" The British bo'suns were singing out the stroke, clear and bold, two hundred yards, one hundred and fifty, the green sea foaming away from the boats' prows, when Johnny called for small-arm fire; and in the crash of muskets, the little cannon boomed again, to be answered by the swivel guns from the British barges. A man went down with blood gushing from the stump of his neck—Nick Kelly, Johnny thought, but there would be more and more now that hell had broken loose—and the cook rushed up with two pots of boiling pitch just as Johnny roared:

"Repel boarders!"

Then the captain's barge smashed into the clipper's side, disgorging seamen and marines, and then one after another, more and more of the frigate's boats. The thirty-six fought screaming wild, shouting, clubbing their muskets, jabbing with pikes where there was room, using knives to better effect, belaying pins, bare fists, teeth, shoulder to shoulder,

the whole of the clipper's narrow deck packed with men, Johnny in the center on the deckhouse, jabbing like a devil with his pike, and blood, ankle-deep, running like water.

The marines and British seamen surged up onto the deck, and for one long, terrible moment it seemed that the clipper was theirs. And then, with Johnny like the head of a ram, the Americans cut them in two; big Maun Caloway, flailing a five-foot link of chain, freed the stern, and Isaac Gil led a charge that cleared the prow.

The British lost the inch of footing they needed to carry the day, and a moment later the deck belonged to the panting, sobbing Americans, and the enemy was back in his boats, pulling out of range. One last shot Isaac Gil managed, and then the British boats lay on the swell, five hundred yards off, grim and angry, like growling dogs with bare teeth; beyond them, on the windless sea, the great frigate silently rose and fell.

And Johnny Ordronaux, trembling with the exertion, the wonder and terror of the fight, looked about at the damage that had been done.

Sixteen English seamen and marines lay dead on the clipper's slippery deck; four more were wounded, one so badly that he would not live long—and there were more wounded and dying who had been borne away in the boats. But the Americans had paid dearly. The two Mara brother, Jews from Charleston, were dead. Nick Kelly, Frank Lee, and January Fernandez, a Portugese, were dead. Kenton Bull, an escaped slave, who made a fiddle sound like a woman singing, was also dead. And seven more were so badly wounded that they could play no more part in that day's work—al-

though later it so turned out that they had enough strength to pull a trigger.

Isaac Gil, although his own scalp was torn open, did for the wounded, gently, competently; it was such a store of trades the man owned. The English wounded and the worst of the Americans were laid below on the ballast; the dead were dropped overside. Some wanted prayers, but Johnny muttered, "There is a time for praying—" thinking that maybe this was such a day as not many frigate captains had known, and trying to smile as he looked at his men, at little Jimmy Cadwalder, thirteen years old and crying now that it was done, at the blood-covered black giant, Maun, at all the rest, wanting to say a lot, but only telling them:

"Take your breath because they will come again."

And less than an hour later, the British came again. The light boats, damaged by the musketry and Gil's cannon fire, were sent back to the warship, and the fighting men they contained were divided among the five heavy storming barges. The five barges circled the clipper and drove in from all sides. Gil concentrated all his three cannon on one barge, and a lucky ball split her prow, sending her nose deep into the water, and for the moment removing her from the fight. Three other barges turned away from the blast of musketry. But the captain's barge, the largest of the lot, swept under the stern of the *Prince*, clawed against it, and hung. The two men who tried to pike it off were shot dead, and twenty-seven marines and sailors spilled onto the deck of the clipper.

Recall that this Baltimore clipper was the size of a coast guard cutter of today, only narrower in the beam; put on

the deck fifty screaming men locked in a death-struggle. There was no room to maneuver, no room for firearms; it was face to face, neck to neck, knives and pikes and bare fists. And it was also—end it or the other three boats will be back.

Those who remembered—and it was hard to sort apart the events of that day—said that the second fight lasted no more than twelve minutes, a brief probing, gashing deadlock, and then a mad rush led by Johnny Ordronaux and his pike and the Negro, Maun, and his chain, a wild, desperate charge that cleared the deck of the *Prince*, from prow to stern. Seven Englishmen dropped back to the barge and pushed off, and when Johnny roared, "Sink them, Isaac, sink them!" he was gripped on the shoulder by Maun, who pointed to where Isaac lay, his innards spilled out on the deck.

There had been no quarter asked in this. The twenty Englishmen lay dead on the deck, and only fourteen blood-soaked Americans were on their feet.

Maun said afterward that Johnny's face was like stone; but inside of himself he cried. The man Isaac Gil was a scholar and a healer, and he knew the books of the Bible like the fingers on his hand, and the Mishna and the Talmud as well, and Johnny had taken him out of the shadowy synagogue and turned him into a man who kills men. And Johnny was tired now; there was no glory, but only death left.

The captain's barge, with the seven survivors in it, pulled over to the one that Isaac's ball had split and took aboard its crew. The wounded were put in the crippled barge and sent back to the frigate; the other four, like maddened bulldogs,

circled the clipper and closed in to the attack once more.

Fourteen men were not enough to man the bulwarks; Johnny loaded the cannon with grape and grouped his men around them, in the stern. Powder-stained, blood-stained, dripping their own blood, they stood shoulder to shoulder with pike and cutlass. And the four barges emptied their men on the deck.

Then the cannon roared, grape at ten yards—and Johnny led his men in a screaming charge at the carnage.

The tale goes that the third battle was the worst of any, for it was not drive them over the rail; the rail could not be manned; it was destroy them on the deck, fourteen against sixty—or be killed, for this was the way the die had been cast, and they knew that after the toll they had taken, the enemy would not permit any of them to live.

By now, the sun was low on the horizon; on the windless sea, the clipper swayed to the desperate struggles of the men, and blood flowed through the scuppers the way water would when the high seas crossed the rail. And still the Americans fought, Johnny Ordronaux, whose pike was broken but who used the four foot length of it like a sword; Maun Caloway, flailing his blood-red chain; Jacob Peretz, former fur-trader and elder of the New York synagogue, black-bearded, with a knife in each blood-soaked hand; Freddy MacDuff, his partner, using heavy, leaded duelling pistols as clubs—those four and four more. Eight left—when suddenly the fight was done, the barges drifting away. And dragging themselves to the rail, the eight who were left saw that one of the barges was empty of the living; another held only wounded men who groaned in agony, and in the other two there were no more than forty left alive and capable of pulling an oar.

As for the clipper, it was like a butcher's ship, a fisher that hunted men instead of cod, no inch of wood that was not splattered with blood, the thin deck ripped and torn by the grape, the mast splattered with brains and gore, dead men lying all over it, so that you could hardly walk between. . . .

Maun Caloway, the chain hanging from his great arms, moaned, "Ah, God, let that damn wind blow and take us away—"

But the wind did not blow. The slow drift had increased the distance between frigate and clipper to three miles now, but even the swell was gone from the still sea, and the frigate made a black silhouette against the setting sun. A few hundred yards off, the frigate's barges lay, lurking, waiting. . . .

On the clipper, the eight who were left sank down in the blood and gore, too weary to move, so close to death that they did not mind it now—so recently for the others, so soon for them. Johnny lay with his arm against the boy, Jimmy Cadwalder; his foot touched a dead marine; the sun set and death made a cloak with darkness. He had wanted glory, but there was no glory here, and the most beautiful ship of all time would float like a coffin soon.

And in the dark, he heard the rustling under the boat's prow, and called to Maun, "They come back—back!"

That was the fourth battle, the last one, in the darkness, clubbing and gouging at the hoarse-voiced enemy, heavy splashes in the water, and then a pistol smashing the night, and then two men rolling over and over on the wet deck, soundless, and Maun's chain flailing death. . . .

And silence again.

Two men dragged themselves to their feet. black Maun

Caloway and little Johnny Ordronaux; they staggered to the rail and hung over it. The moon was rising now, and not twenty yards away, they saw two of the barges; but in the barges there was only one man, swaying, screaming at them, cursing them—only one man on his feet; the rest of the occupants were wounded or dead. And on that silent sea, the two other barges and the frigate had disappeared.

There were no words to say. For some minutes the two men leaned against the rail in silence, and then Johnny Ordronaux felt a breeze like a caress on his cheek. "We make sail," he said to Maun Caloway.

Now, in Nantucket town, six score and more years later, there is still a memory among the old inhabitants of "The Jew's Ship" and how it came into port with the dawning. You can understand how a legend might arise from a ship with a crew of two, one a black man, the other a Jew, a ship that was blood from prow to stern, a delicate Baltimore clipper that bore five dead men on its deck for each one who lived. They say that even the flag, which still flew from the masthead, was stained with blood, but what they saw on the deck of that ship, those who watched it make port, was of such terrible description that no one wrote it down, except to state:

"Including the wounded, eight survived from the crew of thirty-six."

They also say that the port commander asked Johnny, "How did you come by the blockading frigate?"

"We fight that frigate," Johnny answered, "and we defeat her."

And though it was inconceivable and impossible that a little clipper should come up against a great warship and

live, no one doubted the word of the hollow-eyed, pock-marked Jew.

There is only this more to tell, that Johnny came back to the synagogue in Philadelphia to make his accounting to the elders, and he entered and wrapped a tallith about his shoulders and prayed from the book until it was time for him to go to the altar and speak. Then he spoke to the congregation in this fashion:

"What is the price of liberty?" he asked them, speaking in the old tongue, using the Hebrew word for *freedom*, which is the oldest word of its kind that men know.

No one answered, but each man in the congregation considered to himself how a price might be arrived at. Was one to put on the scale the number of Jews who had died through hate, ignorance, fear and all the other means that gentiles had used against them? Or was one to weigh only those numbers who had fought and died in the Revolution, and whose names were in the synagogue book of records? Was one to add the price of a ship? A home burned? A child lost? Or was one, perhaps, to consider all men, from the beginning of time, Jew and gentile? So you see, no one answered; and how was an accounting to be given when such a price was put in question?

And finally Johnny Ordronaux said, softly, "From my voyage there are profits of a million dollars and more, for my country, my crew, and my backers. I would not mention money in the house of God, except to point out that all this is not the price. The price of liberty is in the blood of brave men, and it was never bought otherwise. That should be written down by the scribe in the record-book of the synagogue. And when that is done, I will post my bills once more and find a new crew for my boat."

Not Too Hard





NOT TOO HARD

ALL in the cabin had a sense of being imprisoned, even the four-month-old baby who lay on her back and whimpered for her mother's milk. It was hot in the cabin—mid-summer heat—and six persons filled it to overflowing. It wasn't a very large cabin.

The boy was eight years old, tall for his age and skinny; he had a round freckled face, with hair like burnt straw.

The boy said: "Maw, can't I go out? Maw, can't a body go out and play?"

The woman ignored him; she was studying a book that was yellow with age. A girl stood looking over her shoulder at the book. The girl might have been a little older than the boy—or perhaps his twin; she was the same height.

The boy tried again: "Maw, lemme out."

A child of two years, toddling on the cabin floor, glanced at the boy with interest. He spoke the boy's name: "Josh."

A man lay on one of the beds that were built out from the cabin wall. He lay with a quilt drawn up to his chin, and in spite of the heat he seemed to be cold. Sometimes he

moved a little, restlessly, but most of the time he lay still, only his eyes moving, watching the other people in the cabin.

Now he said: "Josh, you shut yore mouth! You leave yore mom alone!"

The woman glanced up quickly from the book; her eyes met the man's, and she forced her face to smile.

"Don't excite yourself," she said gently.

The man muttered something, lay back with his eyes closed. The boy crossed the cabin to the one window that had an open shutter. He stood there in a broad beam of sunlight.

"You get from there!" his mother said. She reached out a hand, but he dodged nimbly. He went over to the crib and began to play with the baby.

Drawing up her legs, the baby only whimpered louder. Sometimes she liked to play with the boy, but now her only desire was for her mother's milk. The boy snorted with disgust, and his eyes turned eagerly to the open window. Beyond the window there showed a piece of cultivated ground, a cornfield and waves of ripe wheat, beyond that a stretch of forest. The boy could hear a brook gurgling, and he was thirsty. He thought of how it would be to roll all naked in the brook.

The woman sighed and closed the book. On its cover was printed: SELDE'S ANATOMY AND HOUSEHOLD REMEDIES: BOSTON, 1770.

The girl, deprived of the book's fascination, wandered listlessly about the cabin.

When she stopped at the window, the mother snapped: "Get from that window!" But wearily, as if she had said it too many times.

The baby clamored for attention and milk.

"She makes me sick," Josh muttered.

The woman's eyes fixed on him, and he slipped into a corner, alongside the fireplace that dominated a whole wall of the cabin. He sulked there, reaching out curious fingers toward a large clean-bore musket that leaned against the stone.

The woman rose, went to the bed and leaned over the man. He opened his eyes.

She said: "I thought you were sleeping, Jemmy."

"No—I'm hot, hot like fire. You reckon I need stay covered?"

The boy and the girl were staring at him now, with some curiosity and a little fear. The woman rested her hand on the man's forehead.

"Fever, Sarah?"

"No fever," she smiled, then sat down on the bed beside him. But his eyes told her that he didn't believe, and she felt a strange, wilting fear. She glanced around the cabin. Josh was fooling with the musket. She said: "Josh, you leave that musket alone! You'll be the death of me yet."

"Was there anything in the book to lead you on?" the man asked hesitantly. He twisted himself to face her, and then groaned with pain. He was a big, strong man, suffering doubly, the way a strong man does when strength suddenly leaves him. He had dark hair, but the same light blue eyes as the boy; his face was brown from the sun, but bloodless.

"There ain't a lot about gunshot wounds," the woman told him.

"It said nothing about the bullet being inside?"

She shook her head.

"My pa, he fought in the French war, in Canada. He said

a man could take his death, leaving the lead inside of him."

"That ain't so!" she said.

At the word "death," the girl began to cry.

The mother said: "You, Susie—stop that!"

"She ain't much," Josh remarked. "She's plenty scared, all right."

The baby was crying again. "I'll have to nurse her," Sarah muttered. "I'm straight nervous, but I'll have to nurse her."

The man whispered: "I don't want to be a load, Sarah, but I'm dreadful hot and thirsty. There's water?"

"Plenty of water." She went to the water jug, and his eyes followed her. She held a pewter cup to the opening, but the water stopped flowing before the cup was full.

The girl screamed: "Maw—maw, gimme a drink of water!"

She had left the spigot open. A few drops trickled out, fell on the floor and were absorbed immediately by the packed dirt.

The man had seen; holding himself up on one elbow, he stared at the water keg with wide blue eyes. Then he dropped back on the bed.

Her face impassive, the woman brought the cup of water over to him. He shook his head.

"Please," she begged, "drink it down, Jemmy. There's plenty more water. There's a pot of water I put away for boiling, and a pailful I was thinking to wash the children with."

She lied well; she lied the way only a woman can, when the lie will save, but he knew that she was lying.

Susie began: "Maw, please—" and then saw her mother's face and shrank back. The two-year-old balanced himself

over the crib, and the baby stopped her whimpering for a moment to stare into her brother's eyes.

Then, for that moment, it was very still, the only sound being the gurgling of the brook just within the shade of the forest.

The mother's voice had dropped to a hoarse whisper: "For God's sake, Jemmy, drink this."

He didn't answer, only lay there with his eyes closed. The two-year-old had tired watching the baby, and was now poking gingerly at her ribs. The baby began to scream.

"Leave her alone!"

Susie's eyes were on the cup of water. It was late in the afternoon now, and she had had nothing to drink since the morning. She was very, very thirsty. She took a step toward her mother. Josh had stood up and was staring at the window. Now the gurgling of the brook seemed louder than ever.

The mother bent over her husband and touched his face. It was very hot, and there were little beads of sweat all over it. It was a face which she knew and had known for twelve years, every line upon it, every hard fold of the skin. The cheeks were high and the jaw was large and gentle at the same time. A stubble of beard over it. Yet the face was different, and for a moment she imagined that he was dead.

"Jemmy, Jemmy," she pleaded.

Then he opened his eyes.

She held the water toward him, and even though he shook his head, she was relieved. With a few drops of the water she wet his face, and then she gave the rest to Susie.

At first, the girl stared at it and wouldn't drink; but the expression on her mother's face had changed. The woman was not beautiful, or even fair. Her face was too hard and

too worn. But now the face was gentle with thankfulness.

The girl gulped down the water.

Josh said: "You let her drink—I don't get no water, but you let her drink."

"Yer a boy. I reckon you can stand a few hours without makin' a pig of yourself over water."

She went to the window, stood just to one side of it and peered out. There was no living thing out there, nothing but the wheat and the corn and the green wall of forest. That was what made it so hard, not knowing. Yet she knew what might be out there, and of the cunning and the patience of what might be there.

The sun had dropped low, and now it was just over the forest's edge, throwing a shadow onto the wheat. A wind had come up with the evening, stirring the wheat. But no life. She knew the way a wind stirred the wheat.

She stood there for a while, glancing back into the cabin every now and then and wondering how it would be. Sooner or later it would come to a head. They would leave the cabin—or what waited out there in the forest would come and investigate the still cabin. The musket would be fired once, and then it would be over.

The water didn't make too much difference. It aggravated the situation, but in the end it would be the same.

Her husband said: "There wouldn't be no sign of them, Sarah."

"I know," she shrugged.

She went over to the bed, lifted the cover and looked at his wound. She held herself so that the children wouldn't see.

Living this way, all in one room, it was a strange life. Not

that she complained, thinking only that this was a way of transition, that some day this land would be like the land she had left behind in the East, on the other side of the mountains. Yet it was a strange life, all of them in one room, morning, noon and night.

The wound was in his side, toward the front. He had not coughed any blood, so there was a good chance that his lungs were untouched. Yet the large, gaping hole was red and inflamed. She had treated it the only way she knew, stuffed it full of wet tobacco leaf.

He said: "I hardly felt it at first, like being hit in the side with a bit of rock."

Then, when he would have looked at it, she put back the dressing and covered him.

"It ain't no wound for a man to fret on," he said. "I'll be up outa bed maybe tomorrow, maybe come another sunset."

Then their eyes met. They trusted each other. She realized that trust was what had drawn them westward, where no sane persons would go.

He whispered: "Boone's stockade is west by north—sixty, seventy miles." Then he closed his eyes, and she sat by his bed, wondering. West by north—sixty or seventy miles.

Josh and his sister had crept to the open window; they stood there, peering out and trembling with excitement.

His mother's hand caught him over the ear.

"I don't see no Injuns, maw."

"You stay from that window!"

She began to set out things for supper. Some salted meat—that would make them thirsty. There was corn on the cob, which she had boiled the day before. She wondered

whether to give them the meat. If the cow were only in the house, they could have milk for a day at least. But the cow had wandered away.

She gave them the corn and held back the meat. Some of the corn she mashed up for her husband, but he was asleep when she went to him. She didn't want to wake him.

Josh complained about the food.

"Eat it," she said.

"Why can't we have meat, maw?"

"Time the school was getting out here," she said. "It's a waste of a body's strength to live in a land without a school. You all need a taste of a schoolmaster's rod."

The two-year-old ate with difficulty. He needed water, but he didn't complain. There was something solid about him, something that reminded her of his father. He had his father's name. Josh's mouth was swollen and dry.

She nursed the baby. She sat in the corner, just within the bulge of the fireplace. There was a sort of peace now, Josh and his sister sitting at the table, talking in low tones.

The baby gave up the breast and began to whimper again. Sarah realized that she was dry, all dry, inside and outside. Her mouth was like bad-tasting leather. If it was that way with her, how was it with the children? Before morning came, Jemmy would die. More than anything else, he had to have water.

She put the child back in his crib. Then she went to the window and stared out at the forest. All in the shade now; the sun was setting. A wide band of shadow bordered the forest.

She took down a wooden water pail, stared at it a moment and set it on the table. She could go herself—Josh was looking at her.

If I don't come back—she thought.

She said to Josh: "If I sent you down to the brook for water, you'd come right back?"

He nodded eagerly.

"You know how with pa? Pa was shot. They're out there, waitin'. You know that?"

He nodded again.

She couldn't say any more. Her throat was tight inside and her heart was a heavy lump in her breast. She gave Josh the pail, all the while wondering what impelled her to do it. And then, at the last moment, she would have kept him back.

"Walk," she said. "Don't run—walk."

He nodded soberly. She opened the door, reached to touch him, and then held herself back. Now it seemed to her that this was the culmination of her life, and that more than this she could not be called upon to do.

A waving track in the corn marked his path. In the wheat, he showed again, head and shoulders, and then he was lost in the shadow of the forest.

Sarah felt the girl, close to her, ordered her back into the house. Then it seemed to her that she had been standing there for hours, in the doorway—waiting.

There were sounds from the forest now, where there had been no sound before. Or else it was her mind, making sounds for her to be afraid of.

The baby was whimpering again. Her feet were like lead when she went inside, soothed her. If Jemmy woke up and saw that Josh had gone—Josh was his first man-child, a thing to be proud of and called after Jemmy's own father.

She went back to the door. The shadow of the forest had crept out further; it was twilight now.

She saw him in the wheat, head and shoulders. Then she

wanted to run forward and meet him; and somehow she held back. When he came out of the corn, he wasn't running—walking as she had said and bearing the pail of water carefully.

The shot from the forest was like the snapping of a dry piece of wood, not terribly loud, but ringing afterward, as if someone had fired again and again. The pail of water in the boy's hand shattered to pieces, splashing him. He ran forward to the house, and she bolted the door behind him. Then she was down on her knees, feeling all over him with her rough hand, which she tried so desperately to make gentle.

He was crying a little. There was a splinter in his arm, and he winced when she drew it out. His arm was bruised, but otherwise he wasn't hurt.

Jemmy was awake, staring at them. She couldn't be sure, because now the cabin was almost dark, but she imagined that there was no reason in his eyes.

Josh said: "I didn't drink, I swear, maw—I didn't drink at the crick."

"I know, I know, child."

"You want me to go back, maw?"

"No—no." She was thinking of what Jemmy would say, knowing that she had sent Josh down there alone.

She went to the single window that was open, closed it, and bolted the shutter. Then she scraped flint and steel until a candle was lit. The baby was sleeping, and she was thankful for that. It was a wonder that she could sleep through it. The two-year-old sat on the floor, playing with a piece of wood. Susie was close to Josh, hardly knowing whether to cry or not.

Jemmy was awake. She saw his eyes as soon as she lit the

candle, and she saw that he didn't know. Staring straight at her, he didn't see her. He was repeating what he had told her that morning, when he had come back to the cabin, all wet with blood and barely able to walk:

"I was breaking open that land down the crick bottom. I didn't hear a sound, only the first thing I knew there's a pain in my side, like someone threw a rock at me. Funny about not hearing a shot, just a pain in my side, and then the red devil running at me. I split him with the ax, but there's more. Reckon you kin count on there being plenty more of them holed up here. I got a mortal hurt, Sarah."

The boy and the girl were listening, their eyes wide with horror. Susie crept up to Josh, and he put his arm around her.

She was crying a little, and Josh said: "That ain't no way to carry on."

"Come to bed," Sarah told them, just as if she had heard nothing, and when Jemmy moaned again and again, she made out that it was nothing for the children to be worried over.

The two-year-old slept thankfully and quickly, but it hurt Sarah to see how swollen his mouth was, eyes bloodshot. Josh and his sister slept together in the same bed. There, in the shadow, they became disembodied whispers. Sarah hoped they would sleep soon.

"It's a long way north and west," Jemmy mumbled. "Boone's a fine man and easy to take in strangers. But long walking—for sixty miles. The canebrake ain't easy in summer heat."

Sarah took up the candle and walked around the cabin, from window to window, making sure that the shutters on each were bolted. At the fireplace, she stopped, poking at the ashes. She had heard of a cabin on the River Licking,

where they had dropped down the chimney to invade the place. It might be wise for her to start a fire, only in this heat it would make a furnace of the cabin. They wouldn't sleep with a fire in the cabin.

She took the candle in her hand and stood by Jemmy's bed. He had thrown off his covers, and when she drew them back he opened his eyes and looked straight at her without seeing her.

She wiped the beads of sweat from his face.

"The road to the west is a way of darkness," he whispered. "God help me for going where no man stepped before."

"Sleep, Jemmy," she begged him.

He grasped for her hand. "There's no way out of this. I'm awful hot!" He had hesitated, closed his eyes for a while. She still stood by the bed.

"Where's Josh?" he asked her.

"Sleeping."

"I had a dream that he went. I heard a shot fired. Let me up!" He struggled erect, clawed his way from the bed and sprawled on the floor. She had a time getting him back into the bed. His body had relaxed, and he was whimpering like a child.

After that, she sat by the table for a long time, just sat and stared straight in front of her.

She was very, very tired, and she was priming herself for an effort that would keep her awake through the night. Somehow, she had to manage to remain awake.

When she went to Jemmy's bed again, he was sleeping. She took the candle and looked at the children. Josh was sprawled the way a child sleeps in hot weather, arms and legs flung out, his face buried in the pillow. She bent over Josh, made as if to touch him, and then drew back her hand.

Susie lay on her back, her soft hair like silk over her face. Sarah put the hair away, strand by strand.

Back at the table, she might have dozed for a moment or an hour. She didn't know, started awake in the dark. The candle had burnt out, and something was scratching at the door.

At first, the darkness frightened and stifled her. She had a sensation of being alone in a world of mystery, in a black world that stretched north and south and east and west for more miles than a man could count. Then, in that moment—fearfully—she lived over the great distance they had come from the east, the mountain passes, the gorges, the mysterious forest that stretched on and on, the sense of going into the wild, where man's law and man's mercy stopped.

She had somehow stumbled across the room and found the musket. She stood in the corner, holding it before her, feeling for the trigger. She felt that when she pulled the trigger, the crash of the gun would mark the end of all that had been for them. That way she waited, her eyes fixed on the place where the door was.

The scratching continued, and once she imagined that she heard steps outside. And then she felt that someone out there was listening.

It required all her courage to clink the gun metal against the stone of the fireplace. That was what they were listening for, and she'd let them hear it. Then she raised the lock of the gun. In the night, the noise was magnified—unmistakably the sound of a musket being cocked.

And after that, for a long time, silence.

She was wet all over; drops of water running down her face splashed onto her hands. When she put the musket

away, it was with a distinct effort that she unclasped her hands from the moist stock and barrel.

At the table, she found a candle, flint and steel, and tried to make a light. Her hands trembled, and again and again she dropped the flint or the steel. Finally, she had the tinder glowing, and the candlewick flickered into life. The light was a benediction and a caress.

The baby was crying. Sarah took her up in her arms, soothed her, and began to nurse. A wind had raised itself outside, and the sound of it reminded Sarah of a lullaby her own mother had sung. That was in another world. Perhaps this child would go on that way, westward, as she had gone.

She nursed until the girl slept, and then she sat there with the child in her arms. Jemmy awakened; she didn't notice at first, until she saw him sitting up in bed, looking at her.

He said: "Sarah, it's morning?"

"Soon, Jemmy."

"Why don't you get some sleep?"

"I slept a spell before. I'm all right, Jemmy." She knew that he wanted her to come to him and she put the child back in her crib. Next to Jemmy, she passed her hand over his face; it was cooler now.

"I woke up before," he whispered; "it was dark. I thought—"

"No, the candle went out, Jemmy."

"I been thinkin'," he said.

"Rest, Jemmy."

He said: "I been thinkin' for you to slip out—find Boone. They won't leave the cabin, an' tomorrow they'll close in. Take the kids."

"Leave you here?"

"I'm a man shot through; I ain't no good. You're a strong woman an' you need a strong man. Find Boone, an' find a man to marry an' fetch you food—"

"You'll be better, Jemmy."

He turned over with his face to the wall. She felt under the blanket, found his hand and held it. He had large hands, hard and broken with callus. She tried to understand how the hand could be shorn of strength; everything had come with his hands, even the house they lived in.

She left the bed, sat down at the table again, staring at the candle and wondering idly whether it would burn until morning. She watched it until it had flickered out. Through the crevices in the windows, a gray harbinger of dawn filtered in.

She was filled with an almost childish amazement at the fact that another day had come. It was not yet light enough in the cabin to see anything else than vague shapes.

From bed to bed she looked at each of her children. She bent low over Jemmy, the two-year-old, saw that there was a sort of smile on his face; she kissed him and said to herself:

"He'll have schoolin' anyhow. Seems there's bound to be a day when the school'll come away out here. I'd like a school and a church and a preacher. It don't seem right a boy should grow to man's age without listening to a preacher."

Then she sat herself in a chair and prayed, silently. Even with the others sleeping, her reserve was too much for her to pray aloud.

After that, when the noise came at the door again, she didn't care so much, nor was she frightened, the way she

had been before. With the dawn, a strange peace had come over her.

She took up the baby in her arms and stood waiting. Someone was pounding at the door.

A white man's voice cried: "Halloo in there!"

She was sobbing, not tears but a heaving inside of her which she felt would rack her apart. She had only enough strength to unbolt the door; and then she dropped into a chair and watched them flood into the room with the gray light of dawn, many tall men in long homespun shirts, carrying rifles.

They filled the cabin, full and overflowing. They were big men and the cabin was small. They spoke in full, throaty voices, grinned at her and petted the baby.

Josh and Susie woke, frightened at first; but in a little while Josh was telling them how the water bucket had been shot out of his hand.

The man they called Dan'l spoke to her, a stocky man who was not very tall, yet gave an impression of great size and easy strength.

He said: "My name's Boone, ma'am—I'm mighty proud to meet you." He took up the baby, fondled it with hands that were wonderfully gentle. "It's a fine girl," he said.

She was holding Susie, touching her hair and explaining: "My man was shot—down in the creek bottom, an Indian. There's a doctor with you?"

"I have a way in healing—a small way."

Jemmy was awake, staring at them. Sarah was thinking, "He's like them, tall and strong. He will be."

They gave her water, while Boone bent over Jemmy. She let the children drink first, slapped Josh for gulping. The taste of water on her own lips was like a dream.

Then she went to Boone, stood by his side while he dressed her husband's wound.

"He's hurt bad?" she whispered.

Boone held the bullet between his fingers. "He'll mend soon enough. He'll be a strong man, walking and providing."

She dropped down on the bed, put her face in her hands. Jemmy's hand went out, found her arm and caressed it, the callus rough on her skin.

Boone said: "We'll bide here for a spell, until he's up and around. It's a hard task for a woman, minding a family and a sick man. Some of us will bide with you for a spell."

She looked at him, wide eyes in a hard face, but eyes that were soft with knowing.

"Not too hard—" she said. "Forgive me, I'll sleep a little. I'm fair tired now." Then she lay down by her husband and closed her eyes.

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